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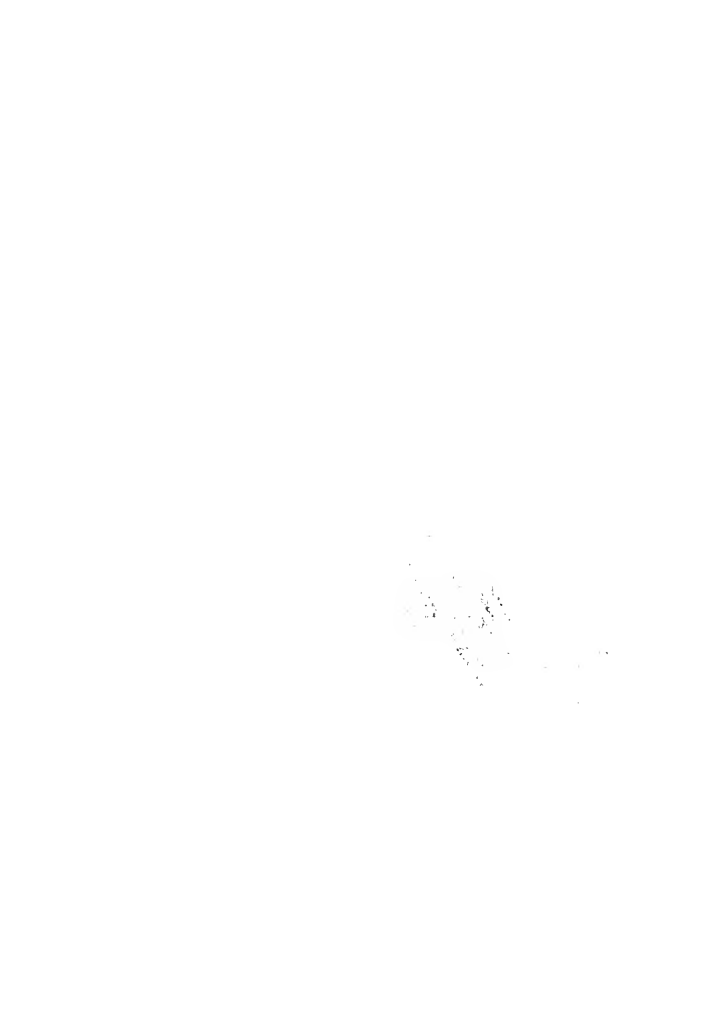
CHRIST
AND
THE PEOPLE



MARK GUY PEARSE

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JESUS CHRIST AND THE PEOPLE

BY
MARK GUY PEARSE



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TO

MY FRIEND

Henry Simpson Lunn,

IN HAPPY REMEMBRANCE OF OUR

ASSOCIATION IN THE WORK OF

THE WEST LONDON MISSION,

I DEDICATE THIS BOOK



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WHAT CHRIST DID FOR THE PEOPLE, AND
WHAT HE COMMANDS US TO DO.

And Jesus, when He came out, saw much people, and was moved with compassion toward them, because they were as sheep not having a shepherd: and He began to teach them many things.

And when the day was not far spent, His disciples came unto Him, and said, This is a desert place, and now the time is far passed: send them away, that they may go into the country round about, and into the villages, and buy themselves bread: for they have nothing to eat.

He answered and said unto them, Give ye them to eat.

And they say unto Him, Shall we go and buy two hundred pennyworth of bread, and give them to eat?

He saith unto them, How many loaves have ye? go and see.

And when they knew, they say, Five, and two fishes.

And He commanded them to make all sit down by companies upon the green grass. And they sat down in ranks, by hundreds, and by fifties. And when He had taken the five loaves and the two fishes, He looked up to heaven, and blessed, and brake the loaves, and gave them to His disciples to set before them; and the two fishes divided He among them all. And they did all eat, and were filled. And they took up twelve baskets full of the fragments, and of the fishes.

—St. Mark vi, 34-43.

JESUS CHRIST AND THE PEOPLE.

I.

WHAT CHRIST DID FOR THE PEOPLE, AND WHAT HE COMMANDS US TO DO.

PART I.—OUR WORK.

THE incident commences with the tender care of the Lord Jesus for His disciples. He and they alike were weary with incessant toil, for there were many coming and going, and they had no leisure so much as to eat. The Master graciously invited them to come and spend a quiet time with Him, and to rest awhile. To any tired man it would be a delightful proposal; to any disciple of the Lord it was a very heaven, to have Him all to themselves, to gather about Him in some sheltered nook, and to commune with Him upon a thousand things that they wanted to say. So on this sunny afternoon the boat is thrust

off the sandy shore ; the Master and His disciples seat themselves, and now the splash of the oars is taking them quickly across to a quiet little bay, deliciously hidden and out of the way, where they may enjoy their brief holiday. But here and there some watched who knew Him. Quickly there spread the tidings whither He was gone ; and the people ran along the shore, gathering others as they went. So it came about that as Jesus stepped out of the boat the people were surging around Him ; every one of the crowd an intrusion upon the quiet He sought, and the hubbub of their disturbance destroying all chance of rest. To the disciples, tired and hungry as they were, it was doubtless a great disappointment, and we catch something of their feeling in the later entreaty to send the people away. But Jesus, seeing the waiting hosts, "*received them,*" says St. Luke. The new version puts on the word a richer grace and tenderness,—"*He welcomed them,*" as if the blessed Master did in nowise resent their coming, but in look and tone and manner proclaimed how glad He was to see them. But St. Mark goes beyond this and tells us that when He came out of the boat and saw much people, "*He was moved with compassion toward them.*"

The word compassion means a great deal—*co-passion*, feeling together with them—so one with the people that He shared their burdens, and felt their fears, and sorrowed in their griefs. But the Greek word means still more than that. It was a yearning pity that drew up into itself all the strength of His life—a longing that filled not only “all the heart,” as we say, but all that was in Him. It was a pity that became a pain. So did Jesus Christ yearn over the people, for that they were as sheep not having a shepherd.

A man's attitude toward the people is a test of his Christianity. Some fear the people, and would sooner break their heads than trust them. Some scorn the people, and only desire to keep out of their way. Some flatter the people, and seek on their shoulders to scramble into position and power. *Jesus Christ had compassion on the people.* He lived for them; He gave Himself up to them; He preached to them, and to them gave the tenderest and choicest utterances that ever fell upon the weary world. He wrought miracles to minister to their needs and to heal their sicknesses. He gathered from them His earliest disciples and His foremost apostles. And

at last, when it was expedient that One should die for the people, He gave Himself, the Just for the unjust, that He might bring them to God. Let us be well assured that there is but one Christianity, and that is a power which makes us like unto Jesus Christ. Therefore is he no Christian who stands in conscious superiority, looking either with contempt or dread upon "the mob." The worth of a man, be he rich or poor, high or low, was declared by the Lord Jesus Christ, when He by the grace of God tasted death for every man. Jesus came *from* the people, *to* the people, *for* the people.

"And He began to teach them many things." St. Luke adds that He spake unto them of the kingdom of God. He set first before them the kingdom of God and His righteousness. First the great, deep, everlasting truth that God is; that He reigns; that into His kingdom of love and blessedness we may enter and dwell as children with the Father; that the laws of His kingdom are holy and spiritual, searching the innermost heart and motive of the man; that into His kingdom we can not see, much less enter, except we be born again; that not only light is it that we need, but life, new life; and that to give

us this life, which is life indeed, Christ has come; that God is in Christ reconciling the world unto Himself. So *He taught them many things*—that first and always first—the claims of God, the commandments of God, the salvation which is of God through Jesus Christ our Lord. Not necessarily first in order, but always first in importance. If the people had been fainting with hunger at the outset, we may be sure that the Lord Jesus Christ would have fed them first that He might be able to teach them afterwards, and that here, too, the order would have been “first that which is natural, and afterwards that which is spiritual.”

The Lord Jesus is not afraid to teach the people the mysteries of the kingdom of God. His religion is not a subtle theory that only the very gifted can perceive; it is a solid reality for busy men and women, coming into the very midst of life's needs and sorrows. His religion is not a dainty indulgence which only the rich and leisured can afford—a thing of temple splendors and costly ritual; it is a life to which the lowest can attain, a joy into which the poorest can enter, a blessedness to which the least gifted is as welcome as any, a rest for the heavy-

laden, a hope for the most despairing, a salvation for the most sinful. He taught them many things.

Let us lay much stress upon it, for the peril of new methods is that we are apt to forget the old. God has given us two hands that we may hold more than one thing at a time. The religion of Jesus must rest upon this solid, definite, assured teaching. It is not a matter of emotion only; of feeling happy, as some think; or of feeling miserable, as others seem to think. For a home, men and women do want something more than a trellised bower, even though the roses be blooming and fragrant. A Jonah's gourd, with its delicious shade, may do so long as the day lasts and the south wind blows; but with the night comes the worm, and with the morrow the vehement east wind; then do the trailing leaves lie withered on the earth. The house in which the Lord would have His people live *hath foundations*—solid, abiding, everlasting; and when the winds blow and the rains beat, that house abideth built into the very rock. It is a cruel and wicked thing to withhold from the people the gospel of God *in its fullness*, fearing that they will not understand it. Fear not; only believe. As surely as the light is fitted to the

eye, and food to the body, and sound to the ear, and air to the lungs, so surely is this gospel of God fitted to the human heart. You might as well be afraid to give your children bread because they have not mastered chemistry and physiology. Let them have it; they will know right well what to do with it. You need not explain it; to proclaim this gospel is enough. There are spiritual instincts which will fasten upon it instantly and find life in it. The fitness of the gospel is the sublimest evidence of its divinity.

He taught them *many things*—*many things*. Christ gave the people the gospel in its variety. He let the manysidedness of it appear to them. It were no grace if his lordship were to invite the people to his castle and show them the back kitchens and the cellars only, thinking that they could appreciate nothing else. No, indeed; none will appreciate more highly the beauty of the flowers; let them stroll through the conservatories. None will have a keener enjoyment of the pictures; open the galleries. None will delight more in the gardens and the landscape. He taught them *many things*—*many things*. For the Pharisees Jesus Christ had

only the awful monotony of His condemnation, but for the people what variety had He; what charm of parable, what sweetness of invitation, what tenderness of promise! Those who have all manner of indulgences may find in a dull service a new sensation; moreover their cushioned pews are so comfortable that they can go to sleep if they will; but for hard-working, tired men and women, let us pray God for grace to set forth the gospel in all its freshness of beauty—brightness, variety, joy must meet them.

He welcomed them. Tired as He was, there was a smile upon His face; His hands were stretched out towards them, and He made them at the outset feel glad that they had come. Ask the Master for the key of Paradise, and take the people into the garden of God. Do not put up notices that they must not walk upon the grass; that they must not pick the flowers; and must not touch the fruit. No, indeed; tell them that it is all their own—*the People's Palace*,—to have it and hold it for ever and ever, if only He is theirs who is the people's Savior. *He taught them many things.*

That first. But what more and what next?

Now the disciples are beginning to get quite concerned about the people, really quite anxious. The sun is sinking low, the evening breeze is springing up; and here is a great company of men and women and children, some distance from home and without any provision. But they think the Lord is so taken up in teaching His great spiritual truths that He is completely forgetful of these earthly considerations. He is, of course, a great deal too heavenly-minded to think that people ever get hungry and that it is nearly supper-time. At last the anxiety of His disciples is so great that they venture to interrupt their Master—it would seem almost rudely—“This is a desert place, and now the time is far passed; send them away, that they may go into the country round about, and into the villages, and buy themselves bread: for they have nothing to eat.”

“*This is a desert place.*” The blessed Lord must have often heard from their lips words that greatly astonished Him, but nothing ever more astonishing than this. “This is a desert place,”—and there *He* stood, the Lord of all the harvests, the Maker of Paradise; He who openeth His hand and satisfieth

the desire of every living thing. That they could think of any place as desert when Jesus was there!

“And now the time is far passed;” as if the Savior did not know what o’clock it was. Indeed, He knew the time better far than they did, and knew that it was much too late for the people to go away without something to eat.

“Send them away.” Surely the gracious Savior was full of sorrow as He heard it. Send them away from Him because their wants were so great and so many! “Send them away into the country and into the villages round about, that they may buy themselves bread.” The disciples themselves were tired and hungry, as we have seen; and very likely their own need made them speak so hastily. *“Send them away.”* It was not the only time that they gave that dark counsel. It was what they said when the mothers brought their little children that the Lord Jesus should lay His hands upon them and bless them. It was what they said when the poor mother came, beseeching Him for the afflicted daughter. If I am going to choose any saint to intercede for me. I would choose, above all, those who had seen most of Jesus and knew Him best. But this “send them

away” frightens me. Right glad indeed am I that I can come direct to the Savior Himself. I know His word: “Him that cometh unto Me I will in no wise cast out.”

“Send them away into the villages, that they may buy themselves bread.”

“Well, but what about those who have not any money?”

“O, we have nothing to do with that, of course.”

“And suppose there is no bread to be bought; what then?”

“Then they must go without; our business is to send them away—then let them shift for themselves. We must not take upon ourselves the responsibility of keeping them any longer.”

So spake the disciples. So speak the Churches still. The disciples of most ages have been much alike in this matter, and very much unlike the Lord Jesus Christ. “Send the people away,” we say. “The sermon is done; we have taught them many things, now pronounce the benediction; *make the collection first, of course*. What more can anybody expect? We have given to the people the spiritual and sub-

lime. We save ministered *to their souls*. Now let them go home to supper and to bed."

"AND JESUS SAID, GIVE YE THEM TO EAT."

Then the disciples were astonished; perhaps more than astonished, indignant. It is a tone, not of inquiry so much as of protest with which they reply: "Shall we go and buy two hundred pennyworth of bread, and give them to eat?—*We!* Have we not left the fishing nets and all to follow Thee? And shall *we*, whose call is so heavenly and so divine, shall *we* go fetching as many loaves from the bakers' shops as we can carry, and give them to all these people?" They were astonished; almost as astonished as we ministers and ecclesiastical dignitaries should be if the Master said to us, "Give ye them to eat." St. Peter, first of a splendid array of apostles, popes, presidents, bishops, superintendents, going to get a supply of bread for the people! It could never be meant that we are to take it *literally*—real bread that people eat. No, no; the idea is almost profane. We must *spiritualize it*. It is so much more dignified if we spiritualize it—and so much cheaper, too.

“GIVE YE THEM TO EAT.”

There is the Master's command to His disciples through all time; and *He means real, common, everyday bread, and a bit of something with it to give it a relish.*

Is it not a cruel thing to meet hungry men and women with a gospel that offers only to save their souls and to take them to heaven *when they die*? Can you not fetch down a little bit of heaven beforehand? The only souls we know anything about are souls with mouths, wanting something to put into them; and souls with backs wanting something to put on them. Really, dear Sir or Madam, do you think it should be any comfort for us to assure you that *there* you shall neither hunger nor thirst any more, if *here* you could not get a crust of bread? Is it any great consolation to anybody to read of golden streets and white robes and crowns, when what one wants most of all is somebody to find one something to do?

“But surely you would not degrade the Churches into bakers' shops and soup-kitchens, and turn the ministers into relieving-officers?”

Degrade? Well, yes; if that is what you choose to call it when men follow the example of the Lord Jesus who gave up His reputation and took upon Himself the form of a servant—who “toweled” Himself, as St. Peter writes—that He might wait upon His disciples and wash their feet. In our midst He stands, the Lord and Master of us, and He saith, “*Give ye them to eat.*”

Happily the disciples did not live in our lofty times, or they might have urged another objection: “It will never do to pauperize the people. They will altogether misunderstand it. They will seek to make Thee King that they may always get their living so easily. It will certainly corrupt their motives and degrade their morals.” O dear! what a deadly poison bread is if you *give it away!* It suits us admirably, and we quite enjoy it—we who can afford to buy it. But for our poor brother in the gate—don’t; it will choke him! “But he is starving.” “Never mind! do not destroy his manliness and independence.” The next week all that was left of that manliness and independence was laid in a pauper’s grave!

When on the last great day the King cometh

with all His holy angels sitting upon the throne of His glory, and saith unto them on His left hand, "I was an hungered, and ye gave me no meat," what think you? Shall we find excuse or explanation that will satisfy Him?

Give ye them to eat: so stands the Master's order. The Lord Jesus Christ teaches us not to save *souls* only, but to save men and women, body, soul, and spirit. Has He not taught us to pray, saying, "Our Father which art in heaven, Hallowed be Thy name; Thy kingdom come; Thy will be done in earth as it is done in heaven?" Can anything be more lofty, more sublime, than these great petitions? What next?—"Give us this day our daily bread." That the name of God *may* be hallowed; that the kingdom of God *may* come; that the will of God *may* be done,—"*Give us this day our daily bread.*" That is essential to the spiritual and the sublime. You can not be very sublime when you are perishing with hunger. You can not be very spiritual when you are shivering with cold. Deal therefore with thy brother as God deals with thee. "*Give ye them to eat.*"

Do you remember the exquisite story of the

blessed Lord which is written on the last page of the last Gospel, as if to linger in the mind as we close the book? It is not when Simon is cold and hungry and wet that the Lord Jesus asks him about his love. All that he felt just then was the need of his breakfast beside some cheery fireside. And when they came ashore they saw how the kindly Savior had stooped, and with those pierced hands had gathered the driftwood and kindled a fire, and there waited for them the Lord, with the gracious invitation, "*Come to breakfast.*" Then, but not till then, the Master put the question, "Simon, lovest thou Me more than these?" That fire thawed and quickened all the generous instincts, and that kindness kindled the heart into a more ardent and devoted love. It is with His own perfect knowledge of humanity that, alike by precept and example, Christ leaves this command to His Church: "*Give ye them to eat.*"

And now let us every one inquire earnestly and solemnly, as in the sight of God, what is our attitude towards the people. Let us remember that our relation to the poor will decide the issues of our life. By faith are we saved, but our faith finds its only proof in good works. Good works must have their

root in faith; but faith must have its fruit in good works. The ritual of our religion, its embodiment and outward manifestation, is a care for the widow and orphan. A passing gift, an occasional subscription, is not the discharge of the claims that the poor have upon us.

To *visit the poor* is a command to all of us—not only to relieve them when they visit us. We must study the conditions in which they live, and use every power to secure homes for decent people when decency is possible; and we must demand that, somehow, comfort shall be within reach of the thrifty. *Above all, Christian fathers and mothers must be prepared to give up their daughters for life and work amongst the people.* A district visitor, giving up one afternoon a week, may certainly do some good; but the actual hardships and struggles of the poor may yet scarcely be known by such a visitor, expected and prepared for. A Bible-woman, spending every day in their midst, will know much more; but we can not transfer our duty to a Bible-woman, who, out of her pittance, can not possibly minister to the needy, or remedy their ills. The Roman Catholic Church can secure its Sisters of Mercy from the well-to-do and

the most cultured classes. Is the Protestant Church unable to inspire a similar devotion amongst its girls? We have seen to-day in the work of the North Africa Mission, and in the China Inland Mission, and, above all, in the Salvation Army, how girls can render the most splendid service amongst the masses, both at home and abroad. Is it that these organizations are less fettered than the Churches generally? Why is it that all the Churches do not catch the inspiration of such example?

There is not in the world at this moment so costly and so utter a *waste product* as our average young lady—the daintiest bit of mechanism in the round world—cultured, dowered with love, and enthusiasm, and devotion, and courage too, yet mostly wasted, life mainly a thing of afternoon tea. Why should not the young lady who has finished her education at costly schools, busied about accomplishments which are mostly forgotten, go for a year to some Sisterhood like that of the London Mission, where she may learn the best method of work amongst the people, finding out her own gift, and how to turn it to best account? That Christian fathers and mothers should grudge their daughters for such service is to make

the Christianity they profess a mockery. We can not accept the Crucified and get rid of the cross. If we are His, it is to repeat His life and work. The Protestant Church is constantly bewailing the advances of Rome. Who can wonder if the Romanist is willing to live a life of devotion that we reject for ourselves and for our children, contenting ourselves with the payment of an occasional subscription? The Church which will make the best use of its women is the Church that will come to have the strongest hold of the world.

PART II.—OURSELVES.

AND He said, "*Give ye them to eat.*" How they must have gasped with horror at the word! They lifted their eyes to the great crowd of people—five thousand men, besides women and children—and they were to feed all these out here in the wilderness, far from any supplies! *It was utterly impossible!*

Of course it was. That is why Jesus Christ commanded them to do it. No man can do anything worth doing for the Lord until he finds that he has to do the impossible. Have we not been told by them of old time that the word *can't* must not be found

in our dictionary? It is the very A B C of our service. The moment we think we *can* we may be sure we can not; but when we know right well that we can not, then there is some hope for us. If our work as the disciples of the Lord Jesus Christ means anything at all, it just means that, *the impossible*. Take it in any aspect you like; look at the work itself—the salvation of men and women; look at the provision for the work—a revelation from Heaven to guide us, the thousand promises of God's presence, the redemption of the world by our Lord Jesus Christ, the gift of the Holy Ghost,—all this is ours because our work is impossible to any but Omnipotence. "*I can't*;" be it only your boast, not your despair, and you may make it your watchword. "Ye can do nothing," saith the Master, not to discourage, but that we may make room for Himself. That blessed helplessness casts us upon the Almighty for help, and then we, too, are almighty, and the "*I can't*" is turned into "*I can do all things through Him which strengtheneth me.*" The Church of God is never true to her calling until she is face to face with the impossible. To compel the confidence alike of her own people as well as of the world, the Church must continually be achiev-

ing such triumphs as shall warrant the boast of a Divine origin and a Divine commission. A Church that is increased in goods and *in need of nothing* must ever be poor and blind and miserable; a thing in which her very children have no faith; her own people becoming hopeless, skeptical, and even scornful of the religion which she professes. We can only keep our own souls right with God when we are attempting that which makes us feel through and through us our need of the Almighty. Nothing so soon and so surely makes us forget God as being able to do without Him.

“How many loaves have ye?” said Jesus. “Go and see.” And when they knew they said, “*Five—five.*” We all of us know the tone in which it is spoken—the long-drawn, melancholy tone in which the Church is always speaking of its own resources, the head on one side, and the hands hanging hopelessly, and the voice a lamentable one indeed—“*Five!*” Then began that sum in long division which is always distracting the Church of God. Five loaves amongst five thousand men, beside women and children; how much for each? What a poor little niggardly Church it must

always be so long as the disciples see only the crowd and the loaves! How we are always at our wits' end for money and everything else; always bewildered by some such dreadful proportion as this between demand and supply! The whole scheme and notion of our religion is a thing utterly ridiculous and absurd. You can not do it, my dear sirs. A crumb apiece, and that but a little one. Give it up. Tell the people that you are very sorry, that you find you have made a great mistake, and that the provisions will not go round. Or else go begging for subscriptions, scour the country, and collect the begrudged scraps and cheese-parings, and come back to find that a great many of the people have gone, and that the rest do not greatly relish the fare. *That* perhaps you can do; some people do, but it is hard work. Stay, there is one thing more: *if you like, you can let the Lord Jesus Christ come in to help you.* When we are utterly incapable for the work which is required of us; when our resources are hopelessly inadequate, then—we need not go either begging or borrowing—*then* there is room for the Almighty; *then* look for the miracle. Your helplessness is God's opportunity.

St. Matthew puts in a word here that St. Mark implies. Of the five loaves and the two fishes, *He said, "Bring them hither to Me."* Now that is the missing link between the hungry world and the Divine sources. Away yonder in the hills the rain-clouds empty their abundance, and the hollows hold the water, a great storehouse for the changeful seasons. And down in the valley are the people, perishing in cruel thirst; because there is lacking the pipe that communicates and distributes—the pipe that reaches away up to the lake. There is an infinite store of grace for the needs of the whole world: *full of grace and truth* is the word which tells of Jesus Christ; full of grace and truth—a reservoir of love and power that can heal all sorrows, and meet all needs, and satisfy the hungry soul with goodness; but the one thing that is lacking is the communication, the contact, drawing upon the Divine fullness that we may distribute it. A pipe is such a little thing, between a lake and a city. Well, only keep it running and it will go a long way and minister to very many. He said, *"Bring them unto Me."* We never know what good we are until we get into contact with the Lord. Let us press this upon our

hearts very solemnly. It may be that you have received the Lord Jesus Christ as your Savior, and yet *perhaps you have never really and deliberately surrendered yourself to Him for service.* Have you? The little that is wholly given up to Him will go further than the great deal that we can find apart from Him. "*Bring them unto Me.*" It was an absurdly small provision—five barley loaves and two small fishes; enough for one hungry man, and here are five thousand hungry men. But never mind; much or little, let Him have it. The work of God in the world is mostly done, not by splendid geniuses, but by simple men and women wholly given up to God. Five loaves in His hand will do more than whole granaries filled with the finest of wheat, especially if you keep the door locked and have lost the key. Do you not stand just as perplexed as the disciples? with so vast a work to be done, and you—without gifts, without organization, without money, without any provision. The Master calls you, "*Bring it unto Me.*" Have you a desire to do something, a poor, feeble, flickering wish? Well, take it to Him. Are you where sin seems rampant and triumphant, and you feel that something ought to be done? Take *that* to Him. We are responsible, not for what we are,

but for what we might be; and there is but one way in which we can ever get rid of the responsibility that rests upon us; it is when we have given ourselves up wholly to Him. Do it. Do it to-day. Do it daily. Surrender yourself to Him for service. Do not put upon yourself a great strain of effort that you can not sustain. Do not make any great promises or pledges. Tell the blessed Master that you do give yourself to Him, simply and sincerely, as best you know how; and that you want to be wholly His. Do it now, while yet you are reading these words. That was all He asked of the disciples; *then*, but not till then, He was willing to do all the rest. That is all He asks of us, "*Bring them unto Me.*" Begin every day with a definite act of surrender to the Lord for His service and for ministry to others, the channel by which something of God's own love and pity and helpfulness may flow into our poor world to bless and gladden it.

PART III.—OUR MASTER.

AND now, what more? And what next?

"*And He commanded to make all sit down by ranks, by hundreds and by fifties.*" It was a grand

charity organization. A very beautiful token is it of the Savior's tender care for the people, and it is also one of those incidental, almost accidental, touches which stamp the truth of the story. He is not conscious of Himself, of His greatness or His goodness, but all His thought is of the people. The good Shepherd, He maketh them to lie down in green pastures. Thus there was no crowding; the strongest had no advantage, the weakest no disadvantage; the nearest to Him were no better off than the outermost. Not one was shut out and not one was overlooked. And yet there are some people who think it almost profane to hold that Jesus understands business; and His disciples thought that He was so all taken up with the spiritual, that He could not stoop to think of their common needs! There is one business that the Lord Jesus understands as no other can understand it, and that is the business of feeding a hungry world.

"And when He had taken the five loaves and the two fishes, He looked up to heaven, and blessed, and brake the loaves; and the two fishes divided He among them all." Here is an exercise in addition and division which is good practice for us scholars in the

Lord's school. If you can manage the addition, you can easily do the division. How much does it come to—five loaves and two fishes are seven—and HE—Jesus? Ah! you have got to an end of your arithmetic now; you have not figures enough to count that up. HE—HE—lay all the emphasis upon that; print it with a capital, and let it be all illuminated and glorious; when HE had taken the five loaves and the two fishes—then all was right. Yes, the division is easy, if you have learned the addition.

“And they did all eat, and were filled.” ALL—not one overlooked; no poor, feeble woman elbowed back out of reach; no timid maiden passed by; not a little child unseen or unreachd. The blessed Master doth take us every one and hold us dear. I used to think that He had no favorite; but it is a mistake. We are all His favorites, and He loves us every one with all the love He hath. They did all eat, and were filled—*fulfilled* as Wiclif renders it. The gracious Master doth not grudge His gifts, Who giveth liberally and without upbraiding. They might come again and yet again. I like to pick out some of the guests. There is that plowman who left home early this morning and has had nothing since; he would like

a piece more. Well, here it is, a piece of bread and fish to match. There is the hungry boy who has got through his second helping; he may come again.

“And they took up twelve baskets full of fragments.” Without Jesus they had a great many more mouths than loaves; but with Jesus they had more loaves than mouths. O, if the Church of Christ would but learn to avail itself of Jesus Christ! He has taken the measure of all our needs, and comes abundantly provided for the work, and no one thing will He withhold that is essential for the triumph of the gospel of His grace. The greatest and most successful worker is not the man with most ability, most gifts, most wealth, most influence; it is the man who avails himself most of Jesus Christ. Very, very many of the Lord’s servants are afraid to go to Him and ask for the money and the means to carry on His work; and when one talks to them of men like George Müller and Mr. Spurgeon and Hudson Taylor, they tell you with a sneer that these men do but adopt a crafty method of advertisement! So spake the Pharisees and scribes of the miracles which God wrought in the old time—miracles which He waits to do for all of us if we would but let Him.

See, too that it was only when they began to give

away the provision that it multiplied. So long as they held it, there was only that; when they gave it away there was that, *and more.* The disciples may have begun by breaking off a crumb for each; but gradually their charity grew bolder, and soon, all unmeasured, they brake and gave away with a bounty like that which our God delights in. The only gifts that are ours forever are those which can only be kept by being given away. Love is not love until it gives itself to another; as the seed can never be the flower until it buries itself in the earth. Light and joy must come from without if I am to find them within. Most of us are poor and lean and miserable because we keep to ourselves what is meant to be shared. Light is light only when some world gives the sun an atmosphere upon which it can produce its vibrations. The light of our lives must be found in that which we give to others. There is but one way in which a man can keep the grace of God: he must make haste to share it.

“Is thy cruse of comfort failing? Rise and share it with another;

And through all the years of famine it shall serve thee and thy brother.

Love divine will fill thy storehouse or thy handful still
renew ;

Scanty fare for one will often make a royal feast for two.

For the heart grows rich in giving, all its wealth is
living grain ;

Seeds which mildew in the garner, scattered fill with
gold the plain."

Let us set again before us this scene of the Lord Jesus amidst the hungry thousands, feeding them through His disciples. There is another picture which you may set beside it in contrast—the rendering of the scene which, alas ! the Church has accepted. It is of a banquet where the privileged sit who can pay for their seats ; gathered in their dainty robes about the King's table with costly meats and drinks ; and outside, in cold winds and bitter rains, is the hungry world, looking wistfully within, and longing for the scraps and crumbs that these pious people can spare. Alas ! the world is perishing, and the Church is powerless for want of the true Christ—the great Brother of all men who was rich, and for our sakes became poor, that we through His poverty might be made rich. He stands in our midst, not only to save men's souls from hell, as we in our blindness have thought ; not only to take men to heaven when they die ; *but to*

undo all the ills of our poor humanity—ills social, ills physical, ills spiritual. And about Him they only are His true disciples who gather, not eager only for their own gain and to secure their own heaven, but to receive and distribute His gifts for our poor world. They are the “*hands*” by which the compassionate Savior doth minister to the needy world; the ready and obedient servants to whom the Master saith, “*Give ye them to eat.*” *Hands*—not dignitaries with swelling titles and robed in splendor, but *hands*, lowly and serviceable, busied with soup-kitchens, and penny dinners, and poor people’s rent, and night shelters, and work for men and women; right reverend fathers and mothers in God by their Christlike pity and their Christlike helpfulness.

There is a German legend which Longfellow has given us in his “Hyperion,” that well illustrates the gospel for the day.

“There was once a poor woman in Andernach whose name was Frau Martha, and she lived all alone in a house by herself, and loved all the saints and the blessed Virgin, and was as good as an angel, and sold tarts down by the Rhein-Krahn. But her house was very old, and the roof-tiles were broken, and she

was too poor to get any new ones, and the rain kept coming in, and no Christian soul in Andernach would help her. But the Frau Martha was a good woman, and never did anybody any harm, but went to mass every morning, and sold tarts down by the Rhein-Krahn. Now, one dark windy night, when all the good Christians in Andernach were asleep in the feathers, Frau Martha, who lay under the roof, heard a great noise above her head, and in her chamber, drip! drip! drip! as if the rain were dropping down through the broken tiles. Dear soul! and sure enough so it was. And then there was a pounding and hammering overhead, as if somebody were at work on the roof; and she thought it was Pelz-Nickel tearing the tiles off, because she had not been to confession often enough. So she began to pray; and the faster she said her Paternoster and her Ave Maria, the faster Pelz-Nickel pounded and pulled: and drip! drip! drip! it went all round her in the dark chamber, till the poor woman was frightened out of her wits and ran to the window to call for help. Then in a moment all was still—death-still. But she saw a light streaming through the mist and rain, and a great shadow on the house opposite. And then some-

body came down from the top of her house by a ladder, and had a lantern in his hand, and he took the lantern on his shoulder and passed down the street. But she could not see clearly, because the window was streaked with rain. And in the morning the old broken tiles were found scattered about the street, and there were new ones on the roof, and the old house has never leaked to this blessed day.

“Now, one stormy night, a poor sinful creature was wandering about the streets with her babe in her arms, and she was hungry and cold, and no soul in Andernach would take her in. And when she came to the church where the great crucifix stands, she saw no light in the little chapel at the corner; but she sat down on a stone at the foot of the cross and began to pray, and prayed till she fell asleep, with her poor little babe on her bosom. But she did not sleep long, for a bright light shone full in her face; and when she opened her eyes, she saw a pale man, with a lantern, standing right before her. He was almost naked, and there was blood upon his hands and body, and great tears in his beautiful eyes, and his face was like the face of the Savior on the cross. Not a single word did he say to the poor woman, but

looked at her compassionately, and gave her a loaf of bread, and took the little babe in his arms, and kissed it. Then the mother looked up to the great crucifix, but there was no image there; and she shrieked, and fell down as if she were dead. . . . Since that night it has never moved again. Ach, Herr Je!"

Alas! the Christ of the ages has been but the Crucified—a Christ of eighteen hundred years ago, of whom we carve wooden memorials and preach sermons. But, alas! the Church has so often forgotten and lost sight of the great pitiful Christ, the Brother and Helper of all men, coming ever to heal the woes and sorrows of men and women and little children, to see to their homes, and their daily bread. The Christ who saith, "Give ye them to eat," is gone away; and yet the poor world never needed Him so much as it does to-day. Where is He of whom the psalmist sang long ago, "He shall judge the poor of the people, He shall save the children of the needy, and shall break in pieces the oppressor; . . . He shall spare the poor and needy, and shall save the souls of the needy?" We in our gloom and doubt may almost look up and ask with John, "*Art Thou*

He that should come, or do we look for another?"
We need Isaiah in our midst to rouse the Church of God.

"Cry aloud, spare not; lift up thy voice like a trumpet, and show My people their transgression, and the house of Jacob their sins. Yet they seek Me daily, and delight to know My ways. . . .

"Is not this the fast that I have chosen? to loose the bands of wickedness, to undo the heavy burdens, and to let the oppressed go free, and that ye break every yoke?"

"Is it not to deal thy bread to the hungry, and that thou bring the poor that are cast out to thy house? when thou seest the naked, that thou cover him; and that thou hide not thyself from thine own flesh? Then shall thy light break forth as the morning, and thy health shall spring forth speedily; and thy righteousness shall go before thee; the glory of the Lord shall be thy re-reward. . . . And if thou draw out thy soul to the hungry, and satisfy the afflicted soul; then shall thy light rise in obscurity, and thy darkness be as the noonday."

Nor is it only the prosperity of the Church on earth which is thus secured. Our own entrance to the Church above is by this door, and this alone. The Son of man is coming again in His glory and all His holy angels with Him, and, sitting upon the throne of His glory, He shall determine the dread issue of all lives. He shall separate them one from another, and all shall find themselves in one of two great classes. To the one is spoken the word *Come*; to the other the word *Depart*. For the one, the blessedness of the Father and the joy of the Lord; for the other, that deep, dark mystery of hell. What is that terrible line of severance? Listen: "*I was an hungered, and ye gave Me meat: I was thirsty, and ye gave Me drink: I was a stranger, and ye took Me in: naked, and ye clothed Me: I was sick, and ye visited Me: I was in prison, and ye came unto Me. . . . Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these My brethren, ye have done it unto Me.*"

II.

THE GREAT-HEARTED GOD.

“He despiseth not any, being great in wisdom and in heart” (marginal rendering).—Job xxxvi, 5.

“He spake this parable unto certain that trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and despised others.”—St. Luke xviii, 9.

GOD is *great in heart*. It is a conception of God which I do not remember to have met with anywhere else. Tennyson sings of one, “Dowered with the love of love, the hate of hate, the scorn of scorn.” It is as fine a description of a noble character as could be put into so few words. That made infinite is true of God. His beyond all is “the love of love, the hate of hate, the scorn of scorn.” It will be helpful to us to take the picture of scorn set forth in the parable which the Lord Jesus Christ gives us, and then to see by all the force of contrast how God treats the despicable.

Underneath the same blue heavens two men go on their way, each moving towards the Temple. It rises before them in all its stateliness—the steps that lead up to the Gate Beautiful. Beyond, there stretches the marble portico; all radiant in the sun is the gilded roof; and the spires rise up sharply to the sky. All proclaims the greatness of the God of Israel. And in keeping with the grandeur of the place is this Pharisee who is going to pray; one for whom the people make way, greeting him with lowly homage; a man marked off from others by dress, by look, by manner. By his very birth he is accounted more and greater than others; a son of Abraham by descent unquestioned. By all associations and surroundings of his life he has been kept from the rougher winds that beat on “common people.” By all careful training fitted for such worship, his whole life, to its minutest matters, is controlled by his religion. So he goes, a very favorite of Heaven.

And now the publican steps aside to give him place, and is greeted with a scowl of scorn, whilst the white hands gather up the robes lest they should be defiled by contact with this apostate. A publican! None were more utterly loathed than these wretched

tax-collectors. A *publican* was the lowest epithet, the foulest suggestion, to hurl at your enemy. They were traitors who actually collected the hated taxes which Roman authority had dared to lay upon this people of God. That was bad enough. But the method of collecting the taxes encouraged and almost compelled them to be unjust and extortioners. And because despised, of course they were hardened and reckless; counting themselves lost as men said they were, they lived accordingly. Every sense of the Pharisee was offended by him. For his own devotions the Pharisee was scrupulously bathed and anointed with costly oils and arrayed in white robes; and this man was coarse in his dress and careless about his appearance. The haughty Pharisee hurried on in his disgust. Really it was dreadful that one should have to be reminded of the existence of these wretched people.

The publican followed behind that radiant presence and sighed: "O dear me! I wish I were like him, so good, so wise. I am so ignorant and so bad too; I don't understand anything, and I have nothing beautiful or holy about me. And I have so many things to fight against. He has got everything to help him. Really, is it any good for one such as I am

to think of praying?" and with a sad heart he comes on his way.

The Pharisee goes boldly into the court of Israel and *stands*; the word means a great deal more than that. He poses in a studied attitude, for the posture was everything; erect, with head flung back, and face upturned to heaven, and hands outstretched. And he *prayed with himself*. It is a singular phrase. As if himself prayed to himself; himself was his own god to whom he brought the lowly homage of his prayers. "God, I thank Thee that I am not as the rest of men, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this publican. I fast twice in the week; I give tithes of all that I possess."

Then we can think that the Pharisee turns, and afar off he sees the publican, not daring to come beyond the court of the heathen; and *he* prays. If anything could move the Pharisee's utter scorn, that does. The very climax of offense—a fellow like that praying! For a man like that to think about religion, really it is shocking! Why, it is a wonder that the earth does not open and swallow him up as it did the intruders of old. How can *he* pray? *He* does not even know how to stand. Look at him; an attitude

is everything in prayer, of course. His head hung down and his face toward the ground, and his hands on his breast. Really, such irreverence is quite shocking! Does he pass near enough to hear the prayer that goes from that sad heart, "God be merciful to me *the sinner—the sinner*" such is the word. "I am not as other men are, O God; not like this good man, wise and holy and pure; I am *the sinner*." "Really, to tell God that! Why, if he has not anything good to say he had better hold his tongue. People who are so ignorant and so bad as that ought to be kept out of the Temple altogether. Well, I thank God I am not one of these wretched creatures. I loathe the sign of them as things to be despised."

Yet, saith Jesus, "*I tell you, I, who know, tell you that this man went down to his house justified rather than the other.*" He despiseth not any, for that He is great in wisdom and great in heart. Where Pride finds only room to despise, Love will find room to pity and to help. If a poor publican begins to hate the evil of his life and wants to be better, what think you? Shall the great-hearted God cast in his teeth what he has been, and scorn his trembling desires? Never, never! That Hand shall be stretched out ea-

gerly and tenderly to welcome him. Because he is very ignorant, shall the great-hearted God despise him and drive him away from His courts? Nay, never—never. He will make the truth very plain for him, and the way very easy, and Himself shall teach him the A B C of it all, sending forth the Spirit crying, *Abba*—that simplest word for little lips—*Abba, Father*. Because all his surroundings are full of difficulty and hindrance, shall God mock at his endeavors? O, blasphemous suggestion! The great-hearted God shall stoop with infinite gentleness, and watch with unfailing care, and compass him with almighty deliverance. *He despiseth not any.*

My brother, this message of love is meant for us. Scorn, it is a cruel thing; few things have a keener edge and cut more deeply. And it may be that you are just now a very target for its arrows. The man is here who has gone on his way, a leader in sin perhaps, himself the first to mock and despise the silly hesitancy and foolish scruples of any; and now he begins to long after God, to be true and pure and good. Ah! there are a score of scornful voices that despise you. There rings the laughter of hell within the soul. "*You set up for a saint; you belong to the*

good people, so bad as you are! You will never get on; good people are not made like you. They have another kind of flesh and blood; they have not tempers and passions, weaknesses, and habits like yours." And there is the set about you flinging its scorn: "*You* to be so particular indeed; you to make so much ado about your religion!" It is hard to endure. Some men could better fight and die than bear thus to be despised. "Blind to your own interest; so stupidly particular, setting yourself up to be so much better than other people!" Listen, my brother, listen, and let the sweet music fall upon the soul. My Lord sendeth thee this message with His love: "*He despiseth not any, for that He is great in wisdom and great in heart.*"

He despiseth us not even in our sin. Surely if anything could make God despise us it were that. Ignorance, helplessness, misery, have their appeal; they may soften the heart to pity and elaim its help, as the little child is made sacred by its helplessness. But sin is so utterly loathsome in the sight of God, such utter folly, that it might move God Himself to scorn us if He were not so great in heart. I have seen—alas! as we all have seen again and again—

the accursed effects of drunkenness; but I never seemed to look down so far into its deep misery as I did one day at a house where the intoxicated husband sat hiccougging in horrid laughter, a senseless fool—although a man of good position, and at other times a very clever man. His wife followed me to the door, and there, red-eyed and with bitten lips, with hands pressed on her heart, she sobbed, “*O, pray to God for me that I may keep from despising him.*” Even a wife’s heart could scarcely refrain from despising as a fool the husband that she longed to love. To our God in His holiness how utterly loathsome must be our sin; how mean, how ugly, how despicable, it must make men; the ill-temper, the spiteful selfishness, the lying and cheating, the foulness! Yet “*He despiseth not any, for that He is great in heart.*”

See it, indeed, in the story of the fall. Here is the creature taken from the dust and intrusted with the majesty of will, depending upon God for everything and blessed by Him with every good. Yet he rebels against the Most High, and defiantly lifts his hand and asserts his independence. Well might the great God of heaven and earth have despised so feeble a creature for so mad a deed; so stupid and so blind.

“Silly soul, I will fling thee off; I will snatch from thee this high gift by which I have ennobled thee, and this majesty of will shall be no longer thine. Go, take thy place with the beasts of the field; incapable henceforth of good or ill; incapable of will or choice; obeying as the beasts thy impulses, with instinct only and without reason; with a present only, but no future and no past; to eat and drink and sleep, and then returning to the earth whence thou wast taken; unworthy thou hast proved thyself, unfit to be so blest.” So might we have looked for God to speak. But He is great in heart. With infinite hope, with a patient trust, with a great enduring love, He bent over the man, and did not despise him. And lo, to him is given the promise of the Son of God for his deliverance and salvation. The seed of the woman shall bruise the serpent’s head.

But more is there in this truth, infinitely more, than Elihu ever dreamed. *Despiseth!* nay, indeed, that He may uplift and deliver the despised He Himself becomes the despised. Are the weak and little despised; they who have no strength to protect themselves; no helper for their deliverance? He Himself is born the little Babe, and laid in the manger,

wrapped in the coarse swaddling clothes, amidst all the rude discomforts of poverty. He Himself is weak and little and helpless, that He may hallow and endear the weak and little. Are the poor despised—the lowly, the slaves of others? He who was rich, for our sake doth empty Himself and make Himself of no reputation, and take upon Him the form of a servant, that we through His poverty may be made rich.

Yet, most wonderful of all, He hangs the despised and rejected of men that He may bear the very curse of our sins, and lift us up from our guilt and condemnation to His own glory and blessedness. Never was any so mocked and so despised as He, when He hung in the shame of the cross. The passers-by wagged their heads at Him in derision; the priests and scribes hissed out their cruel scorn; the soldiers flung their rude laughter; the multitude mocked Him; and the very malefactors joined in the bitter taunts that assailed Him. The cross of Christ is the very illumination of the text, setting it forth in glorious fullness: "*He despiseth not any, for that He is great in heart.*"

And linger on that life. Never was any passing scorn upon that face, never was any despised of Him.

See, the leper cometh, despised and loathed of all men, for whom horror and disgust were the only greeting, and pity itself was forgotten. But lo, He bendeth over the leper with infinite compassion, and puts forth His hand and touches him, making him whole. There cometh the outcast woman whom the Pharisees stoned with looks of scorn, and of whom they whispered in horror as she came; but lo, for her that Great Heart hath room, and sinking down at His feet she finds love and blessing and a new life, pure and sweet like the life of a little child.

Let us be bold to take this blessed truth as our own. He knoweth us through and through; He readeth all the life in its weakness and folly and sin. Yet "*He despiseth not any, for that He is great in heart.*"

Let us every one seek the grace to be thus God-like. We have each one of us the power by scorning men to bind men's sins, to rivet the chains of evil by which they are held, and to quench the lingering spark of hope within them. "Men may overget delusion, *not despair.*" To live and move with this great-heartedness towards men would be to chase the dreary winter out of souls, and to bring the warmth and blessedness of spring.

III.

THE ADVANTAGES OF COMMON PEOPLE.

“The common people heard Him gladly.”—St. Mark xii, 37.

SO LONG as the world stands the commonest thing in it will be common people. As people multiply, common people will increase; and as civilization advances, the great gulfs that sever men will surely be bridged over. The lowly will be exalted and the lofty brought low, and things shall be, thank God, more and more to the advantage of the common people. And the welfare of the world lies in the welfare of the common people.

There was an interesting article some little time since in one of the magazines on “Mountain Stumps,” in which the writer described the Dartmoor tors as the worn-down stumps of an ancient mountain range once rivaling the Alps; how that, through the long

ages, a thousand subtle and silent influences had been at work grinding down these heights and spreading them into the cornfields and pastures of Devon. In social life there are similar forces at work bringing down the mighty and scattering the privileges of the exalted for the welfare of the common people; not by red-handed revolution and the fury of the Communist, but here, too, by forces subtle, silent, yet irresistible. The future of the world belongs to the common people. The religion of the future is the religion which has most room for common people, and that is the religion of Jesus Christ. This is His glory and distinction, "*The common people heard Him gladly.*"

Once in Abraham's Lincoln's presence somebody spoke of some public personage as "a common-looking person." Lincoln replied, "The Lord prefers common-looking people; that is why He has made so many of them." Certainly the Lord Jesus preferred the common people. He chose to be born amongst them, and to live amongst them all His life. He liked to get away from the scribes and Pharisees of Judea to the multitudes of Galilee. He found in them His readiest hearers, His most trusted followers, and His most devoted disciples. Herod and Pilate found

no fault in Him; but then they had to consider their position; and it may be that each said within himself, "*If I were only a common person I could do as I should like—but!*" and each sighed. You see, it always is so hard to do as you like if you happen to be anybody in particular. Nicodemus paid Jesus a patronizing visit by night; and later on he ventured to beg His dead body. And Joseph of Arimathea lent Him the use of a sepulcher. But it was much more difficult for them to become His disciples than it was for the fishermen of Galilee. It is true that one very rich man came one day for an interview with Jesus; and he was the only man who ever went away from the Savior as poor as he came; who went away grieved instead of glad. From the common people it was that Jesus met with the ready faith and the love that ministered to Him; the joy and solace and friendship of His life were in the companionship and service of earth's common people.

Surely we ought to consider this more than we do—the advantages of common people. Others have "to look before and after;" they have to balance opinions by position; what they think has to be checked and shaped in many ways by what they inherit. Early

prejudices are very hard to uproot; and if you cut them down to the ground they keep springing up again. We make a cruel mistake when we demand that everybody shall be alike ready to receive the truth, and shall acknowledge discipleship as promptly and in the same way as everybody else. Circumstances make that very hard to one which to another is very easy. It is written that “many believed on Him, but not openly, for fear of the Jews.” I do not commend their secrecy, but I am thankful that their faith is recorded; and I do not find that their secrecy destroyed their faith. Better a secret faith than none at all. Nicodemus came by night. It might have been better if he had come by day; but surely it is better to come by night than not to come at all. St. Paul preached *privately to them which were of reputation*, and is not ashamed either of himself or of them. God lets little children learn to walk before they learn to talk; and walking is a slow process, especially with those who are mostly carried. All this is very often forgotten. *Pity the poor* is a sentiment we are all familiar with, and I hope we observe it. But there is another phrase that has yet to become fa-

miliar: *Pity the poor rich*. Pray for them, and pray God that we may help them. We common people are a kind of virgin soil, like the prairies, free and open for the seed of the truth. But the scribes and Pharisees of old time and of to-day are like the stately forests, where there must be much cutting down and much rooting up before you can get room for the seed; and, alas! the branches spread far and wide, and the roots go deep down; and the process of clearing is a difficult and perhaps a painful matter. There are refinements that create a peculiar susceptibility and a liability to a double suffering, misunderstood alike by those who are left and by those who are joined. If you are going to envy anybody, it is safest to envy the common people, who are neither dreadfully poor nor dreadfully rich; who can receive the truth in its simplicity, because they live simple lives, and are simple people; and who can follow Christ the more readily because they have little to leave behind. It is true that Peter said once, "We have left all to follow Thee;" but, so far as we know, his property consisted only of a third part of a fishing-boat, and some fishing gear that would not fetch much. This is the compensation of the common people; they can hear Him

gladly wherever He is, and they can go forth to follow Him.

The religion of Jesus Christ is the religion for common people, *because it does away with them.*

Even in this age—the best which the world has ever seen—the greatest offense of which a man can be guilty is to be a common person. The world, even the *religious world*, can do with badness if it is only brilliant and distinguished. Genius is still more than goodness. But, bad as all this is in our time, it is scarcely possible for us to imagine the haughty pride with which the superior persons, alike amongst Jew and Greek and Roman, walked the earth, and the utter contempt with which they turned from the people. The very idea of a common humanity had never entered into the world; even the deep-thinking Greek had no word that could express it. Jesus Christ first taught that truth, and established it. Jesus Christ has utterly redeemed us from the commonplace. He has uplifted and hallowed the whole race *by His becoming one of us; by His becoming one with us; by His revelation of the Father; and by that which He has done for us.*

Take these points and dwell upon them. *Jesus*

Christ has done away with all that is common in humanity by becoming one of us. We call that common which is plentiful. Who then can help being common; huddled together as men and women are, in such crowds? The cheapest thing in the world is men and women. But Jesus Christ has set a price upon humanity, and such a price! He astonished the world by asking how much better is a man than a sheep? A sheep—why, it is worth money; a sheep is cared for; a sheep can get fresh air and green pasture! But what is the worth of humanity now, since the Son of God came down from heaven to take upon Himself this very human nature—bone of our bones and flesh of our flesh; to be the little Babe amongst its little ones; the Lad amongst its children; the Man amongst its men? If that is not to be called common which God hath cleansed, what then of that humanity wherein God Himself hath dwelt, tabernacling in our midst? He spake with human lips; He stretched forth kindly human hands; He bent over the poor earth and wept for its sorrows; those hands and feet for our salvation were nailed to the dreadful cross; and now that human nature of ours is uplifted and glorified. Seated upon the throne of the universe and

swaying the scepter of all worlds, He Who is our Brother still is King of kings and Lord of lords. No more is this humanity a common thing. Forever Christ has hallowed, and ennobled, and uplifted it. By becoming one of us He has redeemed us from the commonplace.

Again, *He has redeemed us from the commonplace by becoming one with us.* We call that common which is put to common uses. Alas! how poor a thing is life when it is hungry, and when it must bend over the hard work until the sweat falls from the brow! Human nature is a poor thing unless it is robed in splendor, and ministered to by wealth, and waited upon by art, and unless nature's gifts are lavished upon it. But come and see the redemption and uplifting of humanity. The Son of God, the King of Glory, becomes a little Babe wrapped in swaddling clothes and laid in a manger, amid all the rude discomforts of poverty. Is not this the Carpenter, here at the bench with ringing ax and plane and saw? How He must work to keep the roof above the mother's head, and to earn the daily bread! How is He homeless and a-hungered, without a place whereon to lay His head! How wearied is He, without leisure

so much as to eat! How little of earth's luxury did He know, who lay on the rough deck of the ship for a bed, drenched by the waves, and with but the thin dress of the peasant to protect Him from the wild night winds! How poor is He who with His last breath must trust His mother to the keeping of His disciple! Let us no more call that condition of life common which the blessed Lord chose to accept as His own. In these poor circumstances He lived the loftiest and sublimest life that earth has ever seen. He chose the condition of the common people as that wherein He could best fulfill the Father's will, and most widely bless a perishing world. He has exalted the man above his circumstances.

Christ has redeemed us from the commonplace by the revelation of the Father.

Love has nothing common. How common a creature was that poor lad as he went away up the bleak hillside to feed the swine, perishing with hunger; lost, unloved; nothing to anybody in all that far country! But he cometh home. And when he was yet a great way off his father saw him, and ran and fell upon his neck, and kissed him. O, he is much, *very* much, now! "Bring forth the best robe"—nothing is

good enough for him now—"the ring for the finger, and the shoes for the feet, and the fatted calf." He is everything, everybody now. "*This my son!*" So doth our God redeem us from the commonplace. *Behold, what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us that we should be called the children of God; and such we are.* No common person is he, all undistinguished in the crowd, who can kneel and say, "*Our Father who art in heaven.*"

And yet again, *Jesus Christ hath redeemed our humanity from the commonplace by that which He has done and shall do for us.* My brother, whoever thou art, if thou art thy Lord's and He is thine, lift up the head and walk the earth as if thou wert somebody. What pride, what distinction, what ambition, can vie with this?—*The Son of God loved me, and gave Himself for me!* What lofty expectation, what splendid inheritance, can match this?—"Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, shall give me at that day." He is no common person who by birth is so exalted, by kinship is so highly distinguished, and by right and title hath so fair an estate awaiting him. "*When the Son of man shall come in His glory, then*

shall He say to them on His right hand, Come, ye blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world.” “And they shall reign for ever and ever.” Life loses its littleness in Him, and finds its glory in Him; even as the seed lay in the granary, a mass common and unlovely; but in the earth it lost itself to find itself, and sprang up a thing so beautiful that even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these.

The gifts the Savior seeks are gifts that the common people can bring—faith that receives Him, and love that serves Him.

The gift which the Savior brings is that which the common people can accept—HIMSELF TO BE OUR SAVIOR, OUR BROTHER, AND OUR ALL.

IV.

CHRIST AND NICODEMUS.

“Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born again, he can not see the kingdom of God.”—St. John iii, 3.

THIS chapter is certainly amongst the most wonderful of any in the Bible. It would be difficult to find a verse which holds so much as the sixteenth verse of this chapter. It compasses the infinite; the infinite in the love of God, in the person of Christ, in the nature of man, in heaven and earth and hell. But the wonder of wonders in this chapter is the unconscious manifestation of the greatness and glory of Christ. It is a vision like Jacob’s of old—a ladder reaching from earth to heaven.

Set before your mind the young Carpenter of Nazareth, who has lived a life singularly secluded and shut in from the world—a life lonely and little understood by those about Him. Then suddenly, at

thirty years of age, He is thrust into this prominence and great publicity; and in the midst of vast crowds in Jerusalem He preaches the kingdom of God and works many miracles. And now Nicodemus comes to see Him. This Nicodemus is a gentleman of good position, a magistrate and leading citizen. As to his coming by night, it may have been that he was scarcely prepared *publicly* to acknowledge Christ; but it is quite as probable that he knew it was the only time when he was likely to find Jesus at leisure for a quiet hour. The other incidents recorded of him show us a man not timid or half-hearted, but one brave as well as thoughtful.

So then this gentleman of influence comes to visit the young Prophet of Nazareth, thinking of Him certainly as a man sent of God, but quite ignorant of His sublime origin and of the great purposes of His coming. He will give him a word of kindly encouragement. We have so accustomed ourselves to make the Bible a text-book of doctrines, that much, if not all, of the human nature has been crushed out of it by our heavy theology. It seems almost wicked to suggest that Nicodemus had come to talk with the young Prophet about the social and political condition

of Israel, much as a leading citizen might call to-day to see a teacher whose clear insight and earnest words are specially suited to the times. Thus they sit together.

It is with a tone of great respect that Nicodemus begins the conversation.

“Sir, we know that Thou art a Teacher come from God; for no man can do these miracles that Thou doest, except God be with Him.”

We know; not offensively spoken or haughtily, but with a quiet confidence as of a man who is accustomed to speak with authority, whose words are respectfully heeded and obeyed.

Jesus looked at him with those clear eyes which read the innermost heart: “*Verily, verily, I say unto thee*”—here is the consciousness of a sublime authority, of a sublime assurance, instinctive, natural. “*I say unto thee*,” note the individual dealing. Nicodemus was detached from the rulers, from Israel, from the race. He stood alone in that Presence. “*I say unto thee*”—Nicodemus, a master of Israel, ruler of the Temple—“*Except a man be born again, he can not see the kingdom of God.*” Please do not think of the kingdom of God as meaning heaven: we push

everything on to heaven, and so put out of reach that which we need most of all now and here. The kingdom of God is, of course, the realm in which God is known and loved and served—in which He is acknowledged King. To Nicodemus it was in Judea. To us it is in London or wherever else we dwell; *or ought to be*. “Thou sayest, *We know*. I say unto thee, Except a man be born again, he has no eyes to see the kingdom of God—what and where it is; no faculties by which he can perceive it.”

The tone and manner were as impressive as the words were mysterious. At once, with the most perfect ease, without effort, the young Prophet becomes the Ruler, rising at every word higher and higher, until He stands forth the only begotten Son of the Father; and Nicodemus sinks from the confident assertion to the lowly inquiry, “*How can these things be?*” And then yet lower still into a wondering and adoring silence.

To the ruler, with his lofty sense of Jewish superiority, with the glorious memories, the splendid privileges, the glowing promises, which proclaimed his people the favorites of Heaven, it was a bewildering word. Of course the heathen, who were not the chil-

dren of Abraham, needed to be born again. *They* were not of the promised seed; and by baptism they needed to be cleansed and purified before they could be permitted to worship God, and to become the subjects of His kingdom. But what meaning had the words for Nicodemus, so pointedly spoken, "*I say unto thee?*" He was of the sect of the Pharisees, a Jew of the Jews, of the very innermost circle of Heaven's chosen ones.

Nicodemus is startled; perhaps there is a breath of indignation in the reply. "What can you mean?" he asks; "you can not mean that a man can really be born over again."

Again there came the solemn words of Christ; the clear eyes resting upon him and searching the heart. "Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he can not enter into the kingdom of God."

Born of water—this was the only new birth of which Nicodemus knew anything; the baptism of those converted to the Jewish faith—or the baptism of those who at the hands of John prepared themselves for the new manifestation of the kingdom of God. But that was only a form of which this was

the substance and reality: "Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he can not enter into the kingdom of God;" the man is not only not in the kingdom, but can not find any way into it. That which is born of flesh is flesh; that which is born of God alone can know God, and love Him and serve Him. So the ruler sinks lower; and the lowly Peasant from Nazareth rises higher, the Teacher of the most sublime truths, not doubtfully spoken, or dimly guessed, but asserted with authority. Christ does not creep from point to point like mariners of old time from headland to headland, uncertain what might lie beyond; He looks forth upon the whole round of the truth in its fullness. "*Verily, verily, I say unto thee, We speak that we do know, and testify that we have seen.*"

"*I say unto thee.*" The personality gives much more than freshness of meaning to the story; it gives it a fullness and force that we can not afford to lose.

If birth and religious advantages could do anything to put a man into the kingdom of God, Nicodemus could surely claim to be there. His descent went back without a break to Abraham, to whom it was pledged that in his seed should the whole earth

be blessed; he belonged to a nation marked off as God's peculiar people by deliverances and promises such as belonged to no others. If ever a man could claim to belong to God by religious observance and association, this man could. Upon him was the sign and seal of his belonging to God, the mark of that initial sacrament with all its significance; he was constant in prayer, in the study of the Scriptures, and in the observance of the law. If external ceremonies could set a man in the kingdom of God, none could stand more securely than Nicodemus, who, through every day and every hour of his life, was subject to all kinds of religious exercises and ceremonies carried out with a scrupulous jealousy. If religion is in notions, Scriptural and orthodox notions, in reverent feelings, in devout prayers, in generous sentiments, here, then, is a man in need of nothing. Yet this is the man to whom it is spoken: "*Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born again, he can not see the kingdom of God.*"

What, then, was all this a cumbersome folly? This Jewish arrangement of training and worship; circumcision, altars, priests, sacrifices, prophecies,—was it all no good, even though God Himself had arranged

and commanded it? Even so; it was all useless, unless there is something more, and greater than it all. No good, precisely as food and light and air, as education and commerce and civilization, are no good to a dead man. Put life into him; then all these things shall wait upon him, and minister to him, and bless him. *But he must live first.* Sacraments, services, sermons, Scriptures, creeds, may minister to life; but there must be life first of all. The Holy Spirit of God may make use of any of these, and often does, perhaps generally does, as the way in which He moves upon the soul. But without Him they avail nothing. And He is limited to none of these. Some would have us think that the life of God is infallibly and necessarily communicated to the soul in the sacraments. We do not for a moment make light of the holy sacraments when we ask, Where was either baptism or the Lord's Supper on the great Day of Pentecost? It was not through either of these that the Holy Ghost wrought the sense of sin, and moved the cry, "Men and brethren, what must we do?" Go through the history of the early Church as we have it in the New Testament, and search for anything like the mystery of the sacrament; you will search in vain. It is gen-

erally under the preaching of the Word that the Holy Ghost moves upon the people. The very gift of tongues suggests that this is to be the means in which the light and fire of God are to reach men's hearts. And the prayer of the apostles is for *utterance*. He who is sent to preach the gospel declares that he was not sent to baptize, and rejoices that he had but baptized two of the whole Church in Corinth. Yet not always under the Word is it that the power of the Holy Ghost comes upon men, for there is diversity of operation. Paul is struck down under a blinding vision from heaven, whilst Cornelius is met in the quiet of his own chamber. The Ethiopian is returning and sitting in his chariot when Philip meets him and preaches Jesus. Lydia's heart is opened of the Lord as Paul talks by the river-side; and the jailer, trembling and overwhelmed by the terrors of the earthquake, listens to the story of God's love and is saved. In no case is a sacrament the beginning of the work of grace, any more than when the penitent thief was lifted from Calvary to Paradise. The one great essential truth for us to take hold of is this, that there must be *the actual contact of God with our spirit*; that forms however solemn, and services how-

ever impressive, and truths however sublime, are nothing apart from the regenerating power of the Holy Ghost. "*Ye must be born again.*" Must; so saith Christ the Lord. "*Verily, verily, I say unto thee;*" with such solemnity is the word spoken to each of us. This is everything. It is a life-and-death matter; a matter of eternal life or eternal death. As such, let us hear it and heed it. "*Ye must be born again.*" *How* is a mystery, as Christ Himself tells us; and a diversity, as the Bible teaches, and all experience. But that which concerns us is the actual work of the Holy Ghost in us, imparting to us a new nature.

"*That which is born of the flesh is flesh.*" The flesh is that by which we have contact with the world. It is not necessarily anything evil, certainly not accursed. By our birth of the flesh we are fitted for the world about us; with eyes to use its light, and faculties that fit in with its requirements, we have power to turn it to account, to make it our own, to use it, and enjoy it. But outside this world which the flesh possesses is another world, into which our eyes can not see; our hands can not grasp it; our minds can not perceive it; we can not enter into it by any natural power. And now the Holy Spirit of God is come to

impart to us another life; by a new birth to fit us to enter into the life of God exactly as the natural birth fitted us for life in this world. So do we become partakers of the Divine nature, with new faculties and fitted for the new condition. God is known and trusted and loved as our Father, for there is a new consciousness to which God reveals Himself. Jesus Christ is no more only a memory, a name, but an Almighty Savior, an abiding Friend and Brother, our heart's strength and joy; the very possession of our souls, of whom we cry, My Lord and my God! We live with new desires, new aims, new delights, a life not dependent upon the circumstances about us, citizens of another country, ambitious of its distinctions, jealous for its honor, eager for its possession. A life is ours, of which death is not the end, but only the unloosing, the unfolding, the "manifesting," as St. John puts it. Born of God, now are we the sons of God, partakers of the Divine nature, with all its vast and unutterable possibilities, heirs of God and joint-heirs with Christ Jesus.

And now, in seeking this as our own, be sure if this is what *must* be, then it *must be within our reach*. If Christ meets each of us separately with this "I

say unto thee, Thou must be born again," now may I be assured that He has set this great gift within my reach. Let us go forth eagerly to seek for it, since everything depends upon its possession.

Again, be quite sure of this—THAT THE HOLY GHOST IS GIVEN UNTO ALL MEN.

This free gift has come upon all men. Just as surely as God's love is wrapped about the world, and is *ours* apart from will of pope or priest, or service of any kind or sort, or any sacrament whatever—a love of which none can divest us, which none can control, sure as the earth wherein we dwell—as surely as Christ has tasted death for every man; as surely as His coming is a fact which none can undo and which none can limit; so *surely is the gift of the Holy Ghost given to all men everywhere*. It is not, it can not be, limited by any condition. Baptism does not bring out and set before us the fact that the Holy Ghost *is* given, just as the sacrament of the Lord's supper brings out and makes visible to us the *fact* of Christ's death. God's infinite love is not set within the caprice or control of any man living. The great provision of His grace is limited to no place, to no form, to no day. It is alike the common and glorious heritage of every

man and woman living—His *free* Spirit—to be bought by no privileged few; to be earned by no goodness; to be conferred by no authority. As surely as the nature of Adam, this is ours, *not* because we are Christians; ours because we are men and women; ours although we are sinners. Do we not all know it? Have we not all of us proved it? To every one of us has come that gracious Spirit, softening, pleading, prompting, bringing to mind hallowed memories, awaking fear or desire; creating a sense of sin, and stirring holy purpose. Thus far works the Holy Spirit with all men.

But then come in the mystery and the majesty of the will. We can resist the Spirit. We can quench the Spirit. Or we may yield to the Spirit. As many as are led by the Spirit, they are the children of God. It is this mystery which determines in every man what the work of the Holy Spirit shall be. The Father's love is unasked, independent of our will. Christ's death for us is apart from any man's asking or desiring. But the Holy Spirit is given *to them that ask Him*. To all men He is given to bring the offers of His grace, to speak and plead and urge. But He standeth at the door of

the heart which openeth only from within, saying, "Open unto Me." Our asking does not mean that this gift is less freely given than is the love of God or the gift of Christ, but because the asking is the opening of the door. It is the surrender of the will.

This is the one thing, the only thing, we want—this gift of the Holy Ghost. Without Him nothing is ours; with Him we have all. He is come to put us in possession of all that the love of God hath provided, of all that the life and death of Jesus have accomplished. He and He alone can impart to us the life of God. It is a new nature, a new being, that we need. Theories, feelings, tears, agonies, beliefs—what are these if Christ saith, "*Ye must be born again?*" All that we can possibly need is ours in the gift of the Holy Ghost. He creates the consciousness of sin; the true repentance is ours only when He imparts His grace. He brings the manifestations of Christ as our Savior, so that we just rest in Him with assured confidence that He loved us, and gave Himself for us. He brings the gracious sense of God's love to us, so that we look up and cry, Abba, Father. He becomes the earnest of our inheritance, the pledge and foretaste of heaven. Now begin to make it your

prayer, "*O God, give me Thy Holy Spirit, for Jesus Christ's sake.*" Go on making it your prayer, morning, noon, and night. If you can do nothing else, you can do this. Everything shall be yours in this gift; light, peace, joy, love, triumph, all are ours only in the Holy Ghost. Pledge yourself to this prayer. Let it greet the dawn. Let it close the day. "*O God, give me Thy Holy Spirit, for Jesus Christ's sake.*" Bid those about you offer it as a cry for life, a cry that can not fail. Get them to promise you that they will offer it as a prayer to God night and morning. No matter how hard, or dark, or sinful, these things are our need, and need is our claim upon God's bounty. Will you now, as you close these lines, make this prayer your own? And before the day is done go forth and find some other, and bid them offer it. God's love can do no more. The grace of Jesus Christ hath declared of His work, "It is finished." Now all waits on this, on this all hangs: *Receive ye the Holy Ghost.*

Some time since in a large congregation I asked those who had been perplexed about the way of salvation, and those who seemed to need converting all over again every week, and those who never seemed

to get beyond the stage of seeking, and those who thought they were saved on Sundays and doubted it again on Monday mornings, to forget everything else but this one prayer: "O GOD, GIVE ME THY HOLY SPIRIT, FOR JESUS CHRIST'S SAKE." I urged it; and pressed it home as earnestly as I could. For twelve months afterward I received letters from all kinds of persons telling me how they had been led into the full light of the favor of God and were new creatures since they had received the Holy Ghost. Now is all that God has for us, and all that He can do for us, put within our reach. It is all ours for the asking. Pledge yourself to this prayer, morning, noon, and night. *Now*, offer it; go on offering it: "O GOD, GIVE ME THY HOLY SPIRIT, FOR JESUS CHRIST'S SAKE. AMEN."

V.

CHRIST AND THE WOMAN AT THE WELL.

“If thou knewest the gift of God, and who it is that saith to thee, Give Me to drink; thou wouldest have asked of Him, and He would have given thee living water.”—St. John iv, 10.

LAST Sunday morning we took the third chapter of this Gospel, and dwelt upon the story of Nicodemus. In very many respects the fourth chapter is a companion picture to the third. Setting the two together, we find the contrast which completes each. In the story of Nicodemus we see that no religious privileges, no religious forms, no religious training, no clear understanding of the truth—not any one of them nor all of them put together—can make a man a child of God. Nothing will avail but a new creation. *“Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born from above, he can not see the kingdom of God.”* This is the one essential—the great necessity. There must be the

actual contact of the Spirit of God with our spirit. Thus, and thus only, are we the children of God, begotten of God, created anew with faculties and powers by which we can enter into the kingdom of God and possess it as our own.

The fourth chapter brings out the other side of the truth—that no condition however lowly, no ignorance however dense, no circumstances however evil, no character however bad, can shut us out from the great love of God; that as the Father loves the whole world, as the Son of God has tasted death for every man, even so to *every man* there is given the gracious Spirit, the free gift of life. There is no difference.

The story is full of beauty. If it is true of the third chapter that our heavy theology has crushed all the human nature out of it, it is certainly as true of this chapter. Let us try to set the story before us; for a more vivid bit of nature there is not in the whole book.

We pass out of the company of Nicodemus. Take another glance at him; the man with the consciousness of belonging to the world's oldest and

most honored people, marked off from all others by a great gulf; a Jew of Jerusalem where all these distinctions were most manifest; of the sect of the Pharisees, rigidly scrupulous about every little matter of life; a man of wealth and position, accustomed to authority; very moral; very religious; very devout. Such is the man we leave. From the Jew to anybody else was a long step down; but from the Pharisee to the Samaritan was from the highest to the very lowest. Of all the Gentile nations they were the most detested; and they repaid the feeling as men generally repay hatred, very fiercely and heartily. For a Jew to touch their bread was reckoned as defiling as swine's flesh. They were heathen intruders upon Jewish territory. When Israel had been carried away captive, some of the lowest of the Babylonish people were sent to till the ground and to inhabit the cities of Samaria; and soon after their settlement, being plagued by lions, they sought deliverance by worshiping "the God of the land" after the manner of the Jews. Thus, foreign by origin and race and religion, they were to the Jew an unspeakable abomination. Into

the midst of this people Jesus comes. Spent by the long journey and wearied by the noontide heat, He sat "thus on the well;" the phrase suggesting the complete exhaustion, how that He flung Himself on the seat anxious only for a complete repose. But the quiet is disturbed by the approach of some one from the neighboring city. Jesus lifts Himself, and sees a woman bringing a pitcher to the well. That she had the misfortune to be a woman was quite enough to prevent any Jew from speaking to her; for of the six things which no man should ever do, this was one—never to recognize any woman in public. The new version expresses this prejudice—"His disciples marveled that He was speaking with a woman." That the young Prophet of Nazareth, brought up amidst such seclusion, trained in all the rigid traditions of His people, should rise so completely free and so easily set Himself so immensely in advance of public opinion, is indeed a marvel. And yet it is a greater marvel indeed that such a character as this could have been invented, and such a chapter imagined by these Galilean fishermen.

Again the contrast of the scene with Nicodemus rises before us: There the dimly lighted room, probably in the house of the Apostle John, who must on both occasions have been present; none but an eyewitness could have described these incidents. Here the blaze of sunshine; the rippling of the brook on every side; the well, with all its associations; and at the side of it the wearied Jesus, resting. And now the woman puts the pitcher down and prepares to draw the water. We can easily set her before us; her good looks, we can think, having much to do with her history, and with the bold and easy manners which come of such a life and company as hers. She turns to look at the tired stranger beside the well, surely with more of the woman than of the Samaritan; for woman's quick and clear discernment ever gave to Jesus Christ a ready reverence and love.

"Give Me to drink," said Jesus, graciously.

Surprised that a Jew should speak to her, and should ask such a favor at her hands, she replies, not unkindly, in a tone of playful banter: "I am a Samaritan. You Jews have no dealings with us Samaritans, you know."

Those eyes that looked through Nicodemus rest upon her, so pitiful, so earnest; and He, all forgetful of these poor distinctions between men, is only eager to give to her that which He came to bestow upon all.

“If thou knewest the gift of God, and who it is that saith to thee, Give Me to drink; thou wouldest have asked of Him, and He would have given thee living water.”

The look, the impressiveness of the manner, the strangeness of the words, put another tone into her reply, a tone of deep respect: “Sir, the well is deep, and Thou hast nothing to draw with; how then hast Thou this living water?”

How true it is all to the life! The reverence affects her tone and manner, but it does not affect her habit of reply. Nicodemus says little, and does not argue at all. But this woman is ready instantly; her bold tongue is evidently accustomed to hold its own, and something more, in many a wordy encounter with the gossips at the well. “And yet,” she goes on, “whoever Thou art, art Thou greater than our father Jacob”—this with a certain tone of triumph—“our father Jacob, who gave us the

well, and drank of it himself, and his children, and his cattle?"

With those eyes still fixed upon her, Jesus said: "Whosoever drinketh of this water shall thirst again: but whosoever drinketh of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst; but the water that I shall give him shall be in him a well of water springing up into everlasting life."

Full of reverence and wonder, she asks, "Sir, give me of this water." She becomes the beggar, and He rises into the Giver.

Still those eyes are upon her, so searching, yet so pitiful. Then, startling her by the strange abruptness of the speech, Jesus said, "*Go, call thy husband.*"

Instantly the look, the tone, the manner, all was changed. Perhaps glad to have done with words so weird and mysterious, she feels herself now on ground where she can fully take care of herself. The eyes flash, the head is flung back defiantly, the speech is short and sharp: "*I have no husband.*"

Still those eyes are upon her, reading her heart, her whole life. Perhaps to evade their gaze, and to hide the guilt of which they make her conscious,

she turns to busy herself with the rope of the well. Then upon the still noon air fall words which amaze her: "*Thou hast well said, I have no husband: for thou hast had five husbands; and he whom thou now hast is not thy husband: in that saidst thou truly.*"

Surely she starts. With eyes wide open in their fright, with lips parted in astonishment, she shrinks from Him who sits as if He were the judge of the whole earth. Hushed in awe she whispers, "Sir, I perceive that Thou art a prophet." Speedily her quick wit recovers itself, and finds a refuge. Turning from the gaze of those inconvenient eyes, she points to the mountain standing hard and clear in the noontide sun. "Our fathers worshiped in this mountain; and ye say, that in Jerusalem is the place where men ought to worship."

What a blessed refuge from a troubled conscience is religious controversy! What a happy relief to forget the sins of one's lifetime by arguing about the opinions of other people! Besides, it seems very much like being quite religious to be zealous about religious opinions; a great many people really do not know the difference.

See how Jesus uses the very argument to bring

her within the compass of God's love, bridges over their differences by love, just as the same heaven bent alike over Jerusalem and Gerizim. Nicodemus must learn of a love that went outside the Jew and embraced the whole world. She must know of a love that brings *her* within its embrace; her, a Samaritan; a woman; a woman that was a sinner. She had spoken of our father Jacob; but another is her Father, even his Father, the Father of us all. "Woman"—the word has no harshness in it, and from His lips was full of tenderness—"Woman, the hour cometh, when ye shall neither in this mountain, nor yet in Jerusalem, worship the Father. But the hour cometh, and now is, when the true worshipers shall worship the Father in spirit and in truth: for the Father seeketh such to worship Him." Place, form, manner, hour, all nothing; communion and contact of our spirit with the Spirit of God everything.

Doubtless such broader truths had found a place now and then amongst these people, promises of such a Teacher they shared with the Jew, and probably rumors of such an one had reached her. Lean-

ing forward eagerly, she gazes upon Him. Could this be He?

"I know that Messiah cometh, which is called Christ."

Then came the answer, calm, assured: "I THAT SPEAK UNTO THEE AM HE."

Let us recall the character and history of this woman, and dwell upon the lessons of love which the incident teaches.

"If *thou* knewest the gift of God, and who it is that saith to thee, Give Me to drink; thou wouldest have asked of Him, and He would have given thee the living water." *Thou!* what had she to do with these things? So ignorant, so wicked, what could she know or care about these great offers of grace? It is sometimes stated, as if an objection to Christianity, that other great moralists have expressed sentiments very similar to many things which fell from the lips of Jesus Christ. What of that? It does not lessen Christ, surely, to uplift other men. He did not invent the truth He taught, He *revealed* it; and if others had grace to see something of the same truth, let us rejoice and thank God. The sun is no

smaller because there are so many stars that shone before his rising. But whilst others uttered great spiritual truths, they have been for the gifted only; for the initiated; for men like Nicodemus, whose intelligence and position and moral character fitted them to perceive and to receive the truth. *But Jesus Christ is come to make this highest life the common possession of all men and of all women.* This is the glory of the Lord Jesus that He does not come only to reveal Himself to the favored and enlightened few, but to make this woman at the well a child of God. It has been pointed out that between Socrates and such a woman as this a conversation is on record; but there is in it no pity, no help, no reproof of her evil, no hint of deliverance; only the great sage amuses himself by teaching her how more effectually to ply her dreadful trade.

This is the glory of Christ, that He comes to bring the loftiest life within reach of the lowliest; to turn its sublimest poetry into homeliest prose; to fill the dull routine of commonest life with heavenly music; to make the splendid dream of genius the every-day reality of all men. To each of us

He comes this day, eager to give us this living water that we thirst no more. Ignorance, circumstances, sin, have not thrust one of us outside His love or beyond His help. He bendeth over us, searching us and knowing us altogether; and to thee and me He saith, "If *thou* knewest the gift of God, and who it is that speaketh unto thee; thou wouldest ask of Him, and He would give thee the living water."

Turn to the scene again for another aspect of this wondrous love. "And Jesus, being wearied with His journey, sat thus on the well." Tired, hot, dusty, He longs for a draught of the clear cool water; and just as He is thinking of it there comes a woman with her pitcher. What more natural than that He should ask to drink? So should we have read the story certainly. But as the woman comes His own thirst is forgotten. His hunger and weariness are no more in His thoughts. His heart knows only *her* thirst and is full of deep pity for her need. "If thou knewest, . . . thou wouldest have asked of Him, and He would have given thee living water." This is Jesus; tired, but never too tired to pity and to help. Ever forgetting

Himself in His eagerness to do good to others. *And what now?* No more wearied or thirsty, what now, since He has entered into His glory? What now, since all power is given unto Him in heaven and in earth? Now able to save to the uttermost all that come to God by Him, think with what great fullness of meaning the words are spoken to each one of us: “If *thou* knewest the gift of God, thou wouldest ask of Him, and He would give thee the living water.”

The living water. Water is the emblem of the Holy Ghost. All that is necessary to our life, and which has not died for us, is the emblem of the Holy Ghost. Breath, Light, Fire, Water,—these are the figures which set Him forth. We need not dwell at any length upon the meaning of the words. Within us are great needs and deep thirsts which God only can satisfy; a thirst which grows within us by all else with which we seek to quench it. To know God; to rest in His love; to be led by His wisdom; to seek to please Him; to have His presence; to journey towards His house as our home,—this is our rest, our peace, our satisfaction.

“Thou wouldest ask, . . . and He would

give.” His great gift is ours for the asking. That is all. Think again of her to whom the words were spoken at the first. It is not the clear perception of the truth, or the understanding of mysteries, that puts us in possession of it. Rather is it that the gift brings the understanding. It is not in struggling against adverse circumstances and striving after an ideal experience; from *within* must come the deliverance, and not from without. It is in no effort to make ourselves better. It is not too much to say that we are past God’s mending, and must have a new nature. It is a gift—all a gift; a gift and not a reward; a free gift, to be had for the asking. Be this our prayer, and all else shall be ours: “*O God, give me thy Holy Spirit, for Jesus Christ’s sake. Amen.*”

VI.

CHRIST IN THE HOUSE OF THE PHARISEE.

“And one of the Pharisees desired Him that He would eat with him.”—St. Luke vii, 36.

WE have followed the story of Nicodemus, and the story of the woman at the well. It will be an interesting thing to bring these two characters together—the Pharisee and the woman that was a sinner—in the presence of Jesus.

It is pleasant to think that this story may have begun in the words which St. Luke has not recorded, but which St. Matthew gives us. The blessed Master had stood amongst a great crowd of people, and, filled with a rapturous joy, He had cried, *“Come unto Me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.”* There was one in the crowd upon whom the words fell like heaven’s rain upon a thirsty land. Her soul, scorched and blasted by sin, drank in the message with eager delight, and

found in the words the hope of a new life. We can think that Jesus, so quick to discern the neediest, looked upon her as He spoke, and the look would give the words an infinite blessedness. They were for her, assuredly; she could take them all to herself. Was not she burdened and heavy laden; burdened indeed with a load that no struggles of hers could undo? And was it not to her that the gracious invitation was given, "*Come unto Me?*" And then the blessed promise was held forth, "*I will give you rest.*" Well may she watch for an opportunity of obeying His kindly bidding.

Then one of the Pharisees desired that Jesus would eat bread with him; and as the crowd falls back they go on their way together to the Pharisee's house. And now He lies reclining on the couch.

Let us turn to look at the host.

He has given Christ a very heartless welcome, and a very scanty entertainment. The commonest courtesies of life were wanting. Hot and dusty as He was, yet there was no water provided for His feet; there was no kiss of kindly greeting such as was customary; there was no oil for anointing the head. And the rest of the entertainment would

be in keeping with this. There was no hint of enthusiasm; no whisper of affection; no token of any loving regard. Not even was it a stately formality,—all was as empty as it was cold.

Yet do not put down this man as a hypocrite or a knave. Not at all. We overdo the character of the Pharisee, and so we destroy it altogether. This man is just a fair type of a great many religious people to-day; is it uncharitable to say, of most religious people? People who are quite willing to extend a kind of patronage to the claims of Jesus Christ, but who never put themselves much out of the way for Him. They give their heart and energy to their business; for that no care, no toil, nothing is grudged. They give their enthusiasm to politics, if they live in the city; if they live in the country, they share it with their horses and guns. They keep their money for themselves. For religion they are willing to spend an occasional hour on Sunday, and a yet more occasional subscription.

Alas, that our blessed Redeemer, the King of Heaven, should find still so cold a welcome and so scanty an entertainment in many a house to-day!

With such people there may be a degree of orthodoxy on which they pride themselves; but what is much more rigid and essential is a certain refinement of taste, which is really the only religion of many. There is, too, a certain standard of morality, less important however than the standard of taste; and for everybody who does not come up to their standard either of manners or morals, there is a stoning to death with hard judgments, and an equal condemnation for those who venture to go beyond their standard. Look at it. It is religion without any love to God and without any love to man. It is religion without any deep sense of indebtedness, and without any glad devotion. We meet with the character outliving the destruction of the Temple, and flourishing in the Christian Church even in New Testament times. "Because thou sayest, I am rich, and increased with goods, and have need of nothing; and knowest not that thou art wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked: I counsel thee to buy of Me gold tried in the fire, that thou mayest be rich; and white raiment, that thou mayest be clothed, and that the shame of thy nakedness do not appear; and anoint thine eyes with eye-

salve, that thou mayest see." There it is: religion without any deep sense of sin, and so without any glad sense of forgiveness; religion without any need, and so without riches; religion without a Savior, and so without any love.

This man knew of a law which demanded a certain degree of goodness; *that* was exactly the goodness which he himself lived up to. And good people like himself, of course, should go to heaven for ever and ever. And bad people like this woman should go—elsewhere. And he went on his way quite comfortable and contented with an arrangement altogether so advantageous to himself. Alas! how it lives and thrives amongst us still!—religion without love, and therefore without help; religion without love and therefore without hope for any but good people; religion without love, and therefore which, alas! by its services, its exclusiveness, its look, its tone, binds men's sins—and yet more cruelly binds women's sins—as chains. Of that law of God as the utterance of infinite Love, this man had never conceived; of a Love that could not rest only in speaking it in thunder on Sinai, but which must come down into the midst of men, and bend over them in

pity, and at any cost, except the one cost of its own righteousness, lift them up and help them to be all that the law demanded,—of that he knew nothing. *That—that* is the love of God in Christ Jesus; a love going down under the depths of men's sins like the great mountains whose foundations go down under the sea; a love encompassing men and women like the great heaven which doth encompass the world; nay, like the great heaven which doth hold a million worlds.

Look at this man carefully, and see in him a peril that besets all of us who are brought up in religious forms and observances. It is religion without the Holy Spirit of God, who is come to convince of sin, of righteousness, and of judgment to come; to make these the great and awful realities by which the world is tested and all things are esteemed; for without that Holy Spirit who is come to shed the love of God abroad in the heart, God is but a name, religion is but a form, sin is but a notion. It is only by that Holy Spirit that any man learns to say from his heart, "Abba, Father;" and thus only is he brought into true brotherhood with all men. The only escape for religious people from

this subtle and dreadful Pharisaism is to be content with no orthodoxy, with no services, with no forms; to pray day by day, "O God, give me Thy Holy Spirit." He is come to manifest Jesus unto us; *then* is the heartless welcome and scanty entertainment impossible, for then is the heart enamored of His beauty, and thrilled with the joy of His service, and filled with the supreme and passionate longing to be like unto Him; then, when He is *ours*, is there hope for all men. This is Pharisaism—religion without the indwelling and enlightening and transforming Spirit of God, who is the Spirit of Love.

Now let us turn to the uninvited visitor.

The Eastern custom of hospitality meant very literally "open house." The curiosity with which the people followed Jesus everywhere would be sure to follow Him here, and though He has entered into the house He can not be hid. Among the crowd that gathered at the door was this woman. It is not difficult to think what effect the cold reception and scanty provision would have upon her. The almost studied indifference would kindle her love into indignation. As she lingers doubting, it may be

that Christ's eyes met hers. Ah! that blessed "Come unto Me" was no word only; it looked forth from that Face; the parted lips seemed continually to breathe it. The infinite pity of His heart was ever proclaiming that message of His whole life, "*Come unto Me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.*" It is a bidding she can resist no longer. With the hands grasping the box of precious fragrance in the folds of her dress, she hurries across the room and falls at the feet of Jesus. Then all the pent-up feelings burst forth in tears, "a flood of the heart," with which she bathed His sacred feet; she kissed them tenderly, and wiped them with the silken tresses of her hair, and poured upon them the precious oil, while all the sweetness of it filled the place.

A great hush fell upon the company. The host at the head of the table lifted himself indignantly, his brows knit angrily, his eyes shooting lightnings at this notorious intruder, and within himself he muttered: "If this Man were a prophet He would know who and what manner of woman this is that toucheth Him; for she is a sinner."

Ah, Simon, if thou knewest who and what manner of man he is that sitteth where *thou* art, thou wouldest not have spoken thus; for *he* is a sinner! And if thou knewest who and what manner of Man this is who is thy guest, what joy were thine; for this is the Friend of sinners and their Savior!

It is strange, very strange. "A mad world, my masters!" one has often cried; surely it is very often a mad Church, too. There have been many heresies for which men have suffered terrible things, even been *excommunicated*—whatever that may mean. Heresies of word, and even of letter, have stirred the indignation of the authorities, and men have been thumbscrewed, racked, burned, hanged, and everything that could be done in the way of torture; and yet, of all heresies, the most persistent and most deadly is that of which the Church makes but little ado. It is this: *that Jesus Christ is come into the world to save good people who do not think they need any saving*; and if real sinners come to Him—dreadful sinners, black sinners—it is a presumption and an intrusion which good people can not tolerate.

See here the right character, in the right place, seeking the right thing in the right way,—a sinner at the feet of Jesus. Here is a sight that all Heaven shall come forth to rejoice over; and they shall go back to celebrate it in the sweetest music that even angels ever sang. I would that we could linger over it until we share the joy of that Presence, and until we catch the spirit of her great love.

“She is a sinner;” it is the only certificate of character that Jesus wanted. The only thing for which He came, the only work for which He had qualified Himself, had to do with sinners. His very name is Jesus, for that He shall save men from their sins. He is come forth to seek and to save the lost; ever wandering over mountain and desert that He may find them. This man receiveth sinners. He is ever at home with them; let her not be afraid, she shall need no other introduction to Him.

“She is ignorant,” said Simon within himself. *“The people that knoweth not the law is accursed. What does this wretched woman understand of the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven? What appreciation can she have of its lofty promises and*

high glory?" *She knew that she was a sinner, and in that she knew more than Simon knew; and knew all that she needed to know.*

A sinner at His feet. O, blessed hiding-place! A refuge sure and safe, in His shadow, within reach of that Hand; there where all the heart may pour forth its sorrow and the story of its sin; where all His love may look its benediction, and may touch with healing power.

Coming in the right way. She just cast herself upon His love and help. Having no hope but in Him, feeling that the torrents swept and surged about her, but that Hand held her and was lifting her up, and should set her feet upon the rock, she just clung to Him with all the desperateness of her need, with all the strength of her new-found hope, by all the confidence which her love inspired; driven all the closer to Him by the scorn of those about her.

She came unto Him, *and found the rest that she sought.* The hold of the past was loosed and broken; its record was blotted out and forgotten. The touch

of that gracious hand healed the broken heart. His words fell like the very music of heaven upon her soul. "*Thy sins are forgiven thee.*" And there came a new life, fresh, sweet, pure, beautiful, like the life of a little child.

This is Jesus, our Savior, who speaks to us this day. "Come unto Me, and I will give you rest." This, and yet more than this, is ours. She heard only the words from those lips; she saw that face lit up only with joy and hope. But for us this same Jesus hath laid down His life. For us there is manifested a height and depth of love of which she little dreamed. For us that glorious Son of God hath hung upon His cross in all dreadful shame and agony; HE HATH BORNE OUR SINS IN HIS OWN BODY ON THE TREE.

But the story is not finished yet. There, with the sobbing woman down at His feet, with that gracious hand laid on the bent head—that Hand whose touch healed the broken heart—*Jesus became her Advocate and Defender.* The silence was broken as Jesus looked up and said, "Simon, I have somewhat to say unto thee." With what rich blessing

must every word have fallen upon her; what gentle courtesy and tender grace was His!

"There was a certain creditor which had two debtors: the one owed five hundred pence, and the other fifty. And when they had nothing to pay, he frankly forgave them both. Tell me therefore, which of them will love him most?

"Simon answered and said, I suppose that he to whom he forgave the most.

"And Jesus said, Thou hast rightly judged. And He turned to the woman, and said unto Simon, Seest thou this woman? I entered into thine house, thou gavest me no water for My feet: but she hath washed My feet with tears, and wiped them with the hairs of her head. Thou gavest Me no kiss: but this woman, since the time I came in, hath not ceased to kiss My feet. My head with oil thou didst not anoint: but this woman hath anointed My feet with ointment. Wherefore I say unto thee, Her sins are forgiven; for she loved much."

What then—is it better to be a great sinner, an outcast and notorious sinner? No, indeed. But it is best to have the lowly heart that makes much of forgiveness; a love whose passionate de-

votion consecrates the whole life to Him who at such infinite cost hath redeemed us from destruction; this alone can satisfy Him, or us.

How greatly does the poor world about us need for all its sins and sorrows this religion of Jesus Christ! Not a religion which lifts us up into conscious superiority to others, content to go "on our happy way to heaven," but a religion which is a great compassion, and a great hope, and an eager help for all.

Christ is gone; have we then no outlet for our love to Him? "*Inasmuch as ye did it unto one of the least of these, ye did it to Me.*" We can pour forth the alabaster box of kindness to bless and sweeten many lives. This is true Christianity—the great love and helpfulness of Christ multiplied by every man and woman who calls Him Lord; Christ dwelling in us, that we may live over again His life of helping and healing. So do we fulfill His joy, and find our own.

VII.

CHRIST AND THE LEPER.

“When He was come down from the mountain, great multitudes followed Him. And, behold, there came a leper, and worshiped Him, saying, Lord, if Thou wilt, Thou canst make me clean. And Jesus put forth His hand, and touched him, saying, I will; be thou clean.”—St. Matthew vii, 1-3.

“BEHOLD, there came a leper.” It is indeed a thing to look upon and wonder at.

The Savior was entering upon His ministry. Think with what splendid expectation His mother must have followed Him. At His birth the angels came to bring the tidings, and made the heaven ring with their sweet music. The wise men came in all their stately magnificence, with gold and myrrh and frankincense, and laid the homage of the world

at His feet. Old Simeon greeted Him in the Temple as the Christ of God. The quiet, reverent Child had astonished the doctors as He sat amongst them. At His baptism the heaven opened, and there came the voice of the Almighty Father declaring, "This is My beloved Son in whom I am well pleased." Now at last He has entered upon His great work. He has preached His own ordination sermon, and spoken as none else ever should dare to speak. What an awful authority lay in this "*I say unto you!*" Who is this but the Lord from heaven who lightly sets aside the law of old and makes way for another, resting only upon the dread authority of that "*I say?*" What a consciousness of Deity is His! "Not every one that saith unto Me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of My Father which is in heaven. Many will say to Me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Thy name? and in Thy name have cast out devils? and in Thy name have done many wonderful works? And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from Me, ye that work iniquity."

And now as He comes down, great multitudes

follow Him. Ah, well may all Israel be stirred at the presence of such an One! Let their thousands welcome Him. "Zion, behold, thy King cometh." Let Him stand upon the throne of His father David. Let Him stand, a greater than Moses, within the courts of the Holy Temple, whilst all nations bow before Him. Let the rapturous song greet Him, "Hosanna, Hosanna to Him that cometh in the name of the Lord!"

Then suddenly upon the noise of the crowd rings that dismal cry, "Unclean, unclean!" And as the startled people scatter, there comes one scarred and hideous with his foul disease; with the garments of the dead wrapped about him, he springs forth and falls down at the feet of Jesus, crying, "*Lord, if Thou wilt, Thou canst make me clean.*"

Is not this ever the first great lesson that we have to learn: the truth that we need to have wrought into our very hearts? We have thought of the Christ as so majestic, so glorious, and we have sighed, O that I could come to Him as came those great wise men of old, with splendid gifts, and lay them at His feet! We think of Him as so holy and sigh again, Would that we could come

amongst the saintly ones and sit beside Him!
"Behold, there came a leper!"

Look upon it and linger over it. This man, hideous in his living death; *full of leprosy*, as St. Luke says; what can he bring but himself scarred and disfigured, wrapt in the grave-clothes? Think ye that the Lord Jesus gathered up His robes and shrank from him? Nay, verily. *"He put forth His hand, and touched him."* Laid on him tenderly that brotherly right hand, and said, "I will; be thou clean." And immediately his leprosy was cleansed. That is the Gospel. Jesus is great and glorious; not that He may linger on the mountain tops in dreadful splendor, but that He may come down and bend over a poor leper and heal him. And I, blessed be God, not because I am good and holy may I come to Christ; but although I am false and foul and full of sin, that He may make me pure and good. The only gift He needs is myself, just as I am. The only prayer He needs is my cry for help.

"When He was come down from the mount."
It was a much greater descent than they knew or thought; greater, indeed, than we can ever know. Down from the mount of God He came, who

Himself is God, and emptied Himself that He might be one with us. Of old time God had come down *to* the mount, amidst the terror of thunders, and lightnings burned before Him, and the earth quaked as if it reeled beneath the weight of glory. And all Israel, awed and hiding their faces, cried, "Let not God speak to us lest we die." But lo, there is another coming! Immanuel, God with us, comes down to the mount, and there, as the Brother-man, He sits in the midst of the disciples, the meek and lowly Jesus; and He opened His mouth and taught them. The Divine authority breathed in gentlest human tones. From heaven to earth was a vast distance; from the Throne of God to the mount as the gentle Teacher amid the listening crowd. But He must come lower still: "*And He came down from the mount,*" down step by step, until He reaches life's lowest level; and there a leper kneels at His feet. He can come no lower; now He is within reach of all men. This is Jesus Christ, the Savior. Not in the mount does He tarry, amidst the hush of the holy place, teaching a chosen company of eager disciples; not in the Temple does He linger, amidst its hallowed courts, ministering

to devout and saintly souls; He comes to the dusty ways of the city, bending over a leper. This is Jesus—*bridging over the gulf between God and man.*

Again He came down from the Mount of Sinai, bridging over the gulf that severed *the law and the outlaw*. The law drove out the leper as accursed. "Begone!" cried the law, "we have no room for such an one as thou art. There is no place for thee. We can give thee no word of hope; we have no power to help. Begone!" He was forbidden to enter into the sanctuary. For him no sacrifice was offered; no priest could intercede for him; upon his fevered soul there fell no words of benediction. His hand could bring no gift; it cursed whatever it touched. The Temple gates were shut against him, the outcast of Israel. And so he went forth, as one dead, yet envying those that slept within the tomb. Bareheaded, with the grave-clothes upon the lip, he wandered in lonely places, crying, "Unclean, unclean!" But here was One who came down from the mount and bent over him, and He put forth His hand, and touched him, and by that touch he who was afar off was made nigh, brought into the family and household of

God. The curse was gone. That Hand touched, and immediately the leprosy was cleansed. Then was there no condemnation. Made clean, now could he enter with boldness into the courts of God, and now again could he claim all the blessedness of Israel. This is Jesus, the Savior, in our midst, who is come redeeming us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us, taking away the handwriting against us, silencing forever the terror of the voice that condemned us. "There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus." He is our peace.

Then there is yet a third gulf. Strange, indeed, that it should be so! *Christ bridged over the gulf of social distinction.* The leper was a social outcast—shunned of all. No friend knew him; he had no neighbor. He was reckoned stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted; and men hid, as it were, their faces from him. His wife was to him as a stranger; his children turned from him. No kindly greeting ever fell upon his ear; no helpful hand was ever reached to him. Pity was swallowed up in fear; and love itself give place to loathing. But down from the mount came One whose great love could not be turned aside.

With infinite pity He bent over the prostrate leper; His hand went forth and was laid upon him, and that blessed touch seemed to restore him once again to the human brotherhood and family. It was like heaven to him surely, that touch of tenderness, that tone of sympathy. Not to be shunned; not to be loathed; not to be cursed; not to be turned from with horror and disgust,—to think that so great a blessing lay in that! Alas! to how many should that be as the beginning of a new life! This is what Jesus Christ brings to the lowest.

And let us note well and ever, that Christianity is just like Christlikeness, or it is nothing, and less than nothing. Every Christian is thus far a Christ, that in him God dwells in the midst of men; and through him God pours forth His love; so that the presence of such an one is a gospel of hope, and a gospel of help, and a gospel of healing; one whose love and pity do stoop down to the lowest and the farthest off. O, for this true Christianity! Not in sermons only, but right through the whole life, in every breath and heart-beat of it; not on Sundays only and in church, but through all the week, and in all the commonest ways of life and the streets of the city.

Then again should great multitudes follow Him. Thus, and thus only, can the deep gulfs that sever men be bridged, by men and women whose religion is not a respectable orthodoxy, not a selfish salvation, but a living Christlikeness of pity and love.

When I was at Niagara I saw a suspension bridge spanning the great gorge and stretching high above the whirling rapids, of which one told me that it was begun by having a slender thread of silk borne from one side to the other by means of a kite; the thread brought the stouter rope, and the rope grew into a cable, and the cable gave place to chains, and so little by little there grew the massive bridge. Surely it is the figure of the Christian, whose very rising to heaven is an influence upon earth like that silken thread, by which the great gulfs that sever men are bridged over, and those afar off are brought near to one another, and linked in love.

Look at the incident again. "*Great multitudes followed Him; and there came a leper.*" How instantly *the* multitudes are lost, vanished; and the only figures that stand before us are Jesus and the suppliant at His feet! The Gospels are not written for effect.

When we remember what a passionate enthusiasm there was in the hearts of the evangelists for Him of whom they wrote; that they had to write of such manifestations of love, of such indignities and such agonies, it is wonderful indeed that they so little intrude themselves and their own feelings. They are hidden; they testify only of Him. But the great result of this artlessness and simplicity is an achievement of the highest art. The result is seen in the vivid distinctness and the complete separateness with which Jesus and the single suppliant at His feet stand out from all the surrounding. It is so in all the record of His life. In the story of the lost sheep it is the only sheep in the world; the ninety and nine are quite out of sight. The prodigal son fills all the picture; he is the world's only son. When the malefactor begins to pray, the centurion and the soldiers, the priests and the scribes, the passers-by and the multitudes of people, all have vanished; he has all the room. It is a blessed truth, *the soul that comes seeking Jesus is everything*. With what vivid distinctness does that one stand out in the sight of Heaven, as if there were no other to be thought of! If this hour there be in thee the stirring of a better pur-

pose, the going out of thy desire after Him, He seeth, and He cometh forth eager to help. All Heaven is concerned about the soul that seeks Him.

On the cliffside I have seen the coastguardsman walking to and fro, every now and then lifting the glass to his eye and looking forth upon the ships that come and go—the mighty men-of-war, the great ocean steamers, the white-sailed merchantmen, the fishermen's boats, the dainty yachts—but there is little heed of these. A single glance is enough, and then he goes on his way, taking no second look. But see; he stops. He looks more carefully; he looks again, eagerly. What is it that makes him so intent? Now he runs to the flagstaff and sends some signal to the masthead. He rushes away to gather the lifeboat crew. *Yonder there is a flag of distress.* Talk to him now of the men-of-war; of the steamers and yachts; he resents it angrily. That poor craft yonder is to him the only ship in the world. Remind him of the glories of the sky and the wonders of the tide; it is an impudence. He has no eye, no thought, for anything else but that ship in danger.

Great multitudes followed Him; "*and there came a leper.*" Ah! that leper had all the Master's thought,

all His heart, all His care, all His help. O how sacred is the seeking soul to the heart of Jesus! Think you He sits on His high throne amidst the radiant splendor of heaven and the hallelujahs of their rapturous worship? One cry of a needy soul, and lo! His only heaven is by thy side; His only joy is in bending over thee and laying upon thee His touch of healing, and blessing thee with the words of His great love. This, too, is Jesus.

"There came a leper." What think you was this leper's logic? How did he argue the matter within himself? Crouched behind some rock, hidden safely, I can think in the still mountain air the words of this gracious Teacher were borne upon the breeze, and fell like the breath of God's sweet love upon his soul. "If ye, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children; how much more shall your Father in heaven give good things to them that ask Him?" "Surely, He who spake as if He knew the very heart of God must be the very Christ," thinks the leper within himself. "And He whose voice is as full of love as His words are of wisdom, could not refuse to make me whole. Ah, if I could but get to Him!"

And whilst he sits and longs, the sermon is over

and the multitudes pass away with Christ, and all is still.

“Would that I could follow Him,” he sighs within himself. “But I am a leper, unclean, forbidden to come near to any. I can not cover and conceal my leprosy; everything about me proclaims it aloud.” And he looks at his hands scarred with disease, and shudders as if he would shrink from himself. “Alas! there is nothing for me but to hide myself among these rocks, with my dismal cry of Unclean, unclean!” So he sits upon the mountain height whilst before him stretch the fair country and the blue lake, and nearer the winding road in which the multitudes are following Jesus.

Then spake another voice within him, timidly at first, plucking courage as it went on: “But because I am a leper have I not the most right to come to Him? If He is come to help any, surely the most helpless shall be the most welcome. Let those stay from Him who have some passing ill; I can find no remedy, no hope, but in Him. My want shall be my warrant, and in my uncleanness I will find my claim.”

But again within him Fear made answer: “But I am a leper. He will shrink from my touch. And

the indignant people, mad that I should thrust myself upon the Messiah, will take up stones to stone me." Then spake the bolder voice of Hope right cheerily: "Nay, indeed, because thou art a leper, He *must* pity thee. Because thou art so helpless, He must protect. Who else can so move His compassion? This face, these hands, these very rags, shall speak for thee and tell thy tale as no words could ever do."

"But I am a leper," pleaded Fear once more. "I could never get near to Him. The crowd would never suffer me in their midst. They would drive me back from any approach."

Then up spake the bolder Hope: "Nonsense. Because thou art a leper, the crowd shall fall back before thee quickly enough, flying hither and thither in their fright. Thy leprosy shall make room for thee."

And the leper laughed grimly to think, if he could do nothing else, he could certainly do that.

Now he is up and away, leaping down the hill-side. And now he overtakes the multitude, and breathless he leaps into their midst, startling them with the sudden burst of his cry, "Unclean, unclean!" They fall back before him, and there alone, un-

moved, stands the Christ Himself; and the leper casts himself down at His feet. O blessed refuge! There none ever kneeled in vain; thence was none ever driven empty away. The true sanctuary is this, where no enemy can follow, and where no avenger can smite. He whose great love hath its welcome for all bends over him. Then speeds the arrow of his prayer; pointed, feathered, tipped, it can not fail to pierce the skies and reach to heaven. But the answer is more wonderful by far. It was but two words, two of the words which the leper had used, as if the echo came back from heaven: "*I will; be thou clean.*" And that Shadow fell upon him, that Hand touched the leper, and it was done. The heated weariness is gone; and life, pure, sweet, blessed life, came back again. "*Immediately his leprosy was cleansed.*"

See what this leper found at the feet of Christ, and what we may find.

He found a new word. Hitherto the one word that lay upon his lips day and night was *Unclean, unclean!* O how wearied he must have been of that dreary dirge and moan! Here in the dewy freshness of the dawn, as the little company set

forth upon their way, he springs from the refuge of some rock, a ghostly figure wrapped in the garments of the grave, and seems to taint the very air as he hurries away: "Unclean, unclean!" Here at the noontide, when the shepherd leads his flock to rest within the shade, the leper passes by like the shadow of death, making his moan: "Unclean, unclean!" On the still evening when others hasten to the refuge of the city and to the welcome of the loved ones at home, he rises and rushes on with the cry: "Unclean, unclean!" Even in the night-time, as some belated traveler urges his way through the gloom, he starts horrified at the cry that seems to ring at his ear: "Unclean, unclean!" It met him everywhere. The law thundered it at him. Every sight of himself and every feeling within repeated it. It throbbed in his blood, and beat its horrid monotone with every pulse, "*Unclean, unclean!*" until the parched tongue could scarcely utter any other sound, and the lips could scarcely shape themselves for any other word. But now, at the feet of Jesus, he finds a new word. "If Thou wilt, Thou canst make me *clean—clean.*" O blessed discovery! It waits for us all at the feet of Jesus.

Every heart knoweth its own bitterness. Sin in heart and thought and deed; how it haunts us! To some perhaps, like this very leprosy, it has blighted and withered all the life. It may have driven forth from house and home and friends. And now sin seems to meet them everywhere, and mocks them in maddening helplessness. Sin, sin, sin; it fills eye and ear, and has scrawled over all the chambers of the imagery. Is there any escape? you ask. Ah, there is—now, here—in the presence of Jesus Christ! *“If Thou wilt, Thou canst make me clean—clean.”* Take it boldly and make it your own: *“Me, me! Thou canst make me clean!”*

At the feet of Jesus the leper found a new life. Himself made whole, it seemed as if all things were new. His flesh came back to him as the flesh of a little child, of all things most delicate and beautiful. There was not a better-looking man in all the neighborhood than he who had been the loathsome leper. The grave-clothes were gone, and he lived again, restored to his place and to his people. Loving hearts greeted him again as their own.

He looked out upon a new heaven and a new earth. All things were made new. Music and feasting seemed to greet him on every side, and the heart was merry with a pure bliss such as he had deemed impossible. This is the very Gospel of Jesus Christ; it is the Presence of an almighty and pitiful Savior, who is come to make us clean. Not from the penalty of our sin only is He come to deliver us, but from its power. To make us *clean*; to rid us of the foul leprosy of sin. This is the purpose of His coming; to bring to us pure thought, and sweet graces, and brotherly love, and blessed helpfulness; to make us like Himself.

So let us come to Him. "My Lord, I have heard that this day Thou makest a feast to Thy courtiers and followers, and in Thy bounty Thou hast bidden me. And Thou wouldst have me bold enough to ask a favor at Thine hands. To-day give me this grace, to carry forth Thy love into the midst of men. Forever and forever to be rid of the scorn and pride, and all the evil things which do bind men's sins, and drive them from delusion to despair. This shall be my heaven, and I ask no other; to breathe Thy hope;

to look Thy welcome ; to live Thy love ; to stretch out ever Thine own right hand of Brotherly helpfulness !”

There is but one orthodox religion ; all else are heresies. It is that which cleanses us from the leprosy of selfishness, and which fashions us in the very likeness of our Lord.

VIII.

CHRIST AND THE HEATHEN WOMAN.

“Lord, help me.”—St. Matthew xv, 25.

THE Lord Jesus had gone with His disciples away beyond Galilee into the land of Tyre and Sidon. The people were Phœnicians, of the old Canaanite race, scorned and detested of the Jews as heathen and out-cast dogs. Yet here it was that the Savior met with an instance of faith, the most beautiful and the most triumphant of any recorded in the Gospels. Depend upon it, such a change of air is often good for the disciples still. It is well for us to get away, now and then, from our stately proprieties and religious traditions to those who are outside. Good people who live down in Judea, with its priests and temple services, are very apt to think that there is little use in trying to do any good amongst those who are so far off and so ignorant of religion; whereas, amongst these are sorrows and deep heart-

needs that set them longing for such an one as Jesus; and amongst these the freshness of the truth often secures the readiest reception of the Savior and the greatest faith in Him. Amongst these still is it that Jesus finds a faith that gladdens Him; and here, as of old, there is opened up a new world of hope to the disciples. If the Church wants to find trophies for Christ, let her go over the borders, and get amongst the heathen—never, alas! very far to go. I find that those who work over the border are not much troubled with doubts about the gospel; the doubts, as of old, are among the priests and Pharisees. The age of miracles is not over, thank God, in the border country. *There* devils are still cast out, and lepers are made clean, and the dead are raised up, and the poor have the gospel preached unto them. Every Church should live in touch with this region, and every Christian should take an occasional journey thither. If Tyre and Sidon are too far away, and you are only within reach of Soho, drop in at Mr. Nix's class at Lincoln House, Greek Street, on a Sunday afternoon, and you will find many wonderful testimonies as to the miracles wrought in this borderland in the name of Jesus Christ.

Now, in this region it was that "*a certain woman heard of Him,*" so says St. Mark. He tells us that Jesus entered into a house, and would have no man know where He was; but He could not be hid. Why not? This was an out-of-the-way place; not like Judea, where everybody knew the great prophet of Nazareth; not like Galilee, where the multitudes followed Him everywhere. Here surely He may find the quiet and retirement which He seeks. But He could not be hid—for *a certain woman*; that is the reason. *He would have no man* know where He was; yes, that may be easy, perhaps. But *a certain woman*—I see her, resolute, determined; the face set in its defiance, the eyes flash in their eagerness. You will not easily turn her aside. "The weaker sex," do you say? Perhaps so in brute force. But in will, in resoluteness, the weaker sex is generally on the other side. But read on. "*A certain woman whose little daughter was grievously tormented of a devil heard of Him.*" Now, I know that He *can not* be hid. A mother full of eager trouble about her child; a mother whose soul can but find room for one thought; who sees everywhere that poor little tormented maiden rent and driven, writhing in anguish; a mother whose

heart is filled with one great longing, whom one great purpose kindles and inspires,—this Prophet must come and heal her child. Now you may be sure of it; *He can not be hid*. Love is blind, they say. We have often laughed the saying to scorn as a libel, for no eyes are so keen and far-seeing as love's: "*When he was yet a great way off, his father saw him, and ran, and fell on his neck, and kissed him.*" Yet it is true, love is blind, blessedly blind, stone-blind, and deaf, and dead, to hindrances, to difficulties, to rebuffs, to denials. Love so desperate as this mother's can not stay to argue it; it knocks, and pleads, and demands, and triumphs. Love, like faith,

"Laughs at impossibilities,
And cries, It shall be done."

That is the key to the story. "A certain woman whose little daughter was grievously tormented of a devil heard of Him." A mother's love was the inspiration of her importunity, and begat this triumph. The thing that is next akin to omnipotence is a mother's love. When that knocks at the door, He can not be hid.

Let us follow the story. *This mother had everything against her.* She was a heathen, altogether outside the promises and privileges that belonged to Israel. And the haughty Jews in every look and tone proclaimed their own superiority. These heathen were made of another clay, very much commoner than that of the children of Abraham. Outside the light of the truth, outside the love of God, they were to be shunned; and as the Jew passed them, he spat upon the ground and hissed out *dog*. What hope had she of gaining any favor from the Son of David?

Then the case of her child was very desperate. How wearily she had gone to and fro, hither and thither, seeking any manner of help! In vain she had tried all the charms and spells of her own people. And what did she know of this Prophet from Israel? She is very ignorant of all that He is; of whence He came, and why; of His teachings. She has only heard that He heals all manner of diseases; that He is ready to help everybody who comes to Him, rich or poor, saint or sinner. And now that this Prophet is within her reach, shall she lose the opportunity of pleading for her child? No, indeed. Leaving the afflicted little daughter, she hur-

ries forth at once to seek Him, saying in her heart, "I will just ask Him to help me."

"He will look upon you as a heathen, altogether outside His notice," saith one—perhaps her husband.

"Well, I will just tell Him what trouble we are in, and how the poor little daughter is tormented; and if He is so kind and gracious as they say, I am sure He will pity and help me. I will go and ask Him."

That is love's logic. Sorrow knows no geography; it heeds no boundaries. And pity surely will journey into the land where sorrow dwells. "If He heals the sorrows and sicknesses of others, I think He will heal mine. I will ask Him all the more to pity me because I am so ignorant and so far off."

And now, dear friend, is this your case too? You, too, are an outsider. You do not belong to the religious people, and never did; if you did, you have long since gone away outside and over the border. And now you seem shut off by high mountains and deep rivers from the goodly land of God. All the ways of your life, and all that is about you, make faith and prayer and goodness seem altogether out of your reach. And the rumors that come over the

border bewilder you ; different people say so many different things, that you do not know what to think or what to do. But *your* heart is sad sometimes ; your soul is burdened with troubled thought and gloomy fear and loneliness. If there be such a one as Jesus Christ, none needs His pity and help more than *you* do. Be bold, then, to follow this example. Say within yourself, "I will ask Him to help me ; all the more because I am so far off, and because I understand so little. If I know nothing else, I do know enough to say, '*Lord, help me.*'"

And now she sets out on her way. Still everything seems to be against her. When she arrives at the house the door is shut, and the jealous disciples try to keep her from intruding upon the Master. It may well be that they sought to send her away, as they afterwards wished the Lord to do—this troublesome woman whom there was no silencing.

It may be still *your* case. How hard it is to get to Jesus ! The very door seems to be shut against you, and those from whom you expected help do only discourage.

But love like hers is not to be so easily baffled.

She waits and watches until at last the door is open, and then in the twinkling of an eye she is within, and falling down she pours out all her heart: "Thou Son of David, have mercy on me; my little daughter is grievously vexed of a devil." Instantly the love of Jesus has taken the measure of her unconquerable, her resistless love; and delighting in it He would draw out its fullness. "*He answered her not a word;*" but rising up He went forth from the house with His disciples. It was strange. Had she not heard that He was all tenderness and pity? Never a word! and perhaps that very Face turned from her, lest she should perceive the love that the lips seemed to deny. Like the captain who had aforetime gone from her country to the prophet of the Lord, she might well have said, "I thought He would receive me very differently from this." But whatever it meant, there was one thing she could do, and she would; she could cry, "*Lord, help me.*" So she followed Him with breaking heart, crying and entreating.

"Send her away," said the disciples; "she crieth after us." It took a great deal to teach the disciples that God cared for the heathen, and this was to be

one of the many lessons. Stopping so that the woman came close to Him, Jesus said, "I am not sent but to the lost sheep of the house of Israel."

She could say nothing in answer to that, but she could plead her need, and she could cry for pity, "*Lord, help me.*"

Then Jesus spake words for which one needs a *phonograph* Bible. Surely the tones took all the seeming harshness from the words. Looking into the depths of that great love, for a moment Jesus held the gift behind His back that He might draw forth the eagerness and measure of its fullness: "*It is not meet to take away the bread from the children, and to give it to the little dogs.*" Instantly her eyes flashed triumphantly. She felt that the case was won: "*Of course not, Lord, because the little dogs pick up the crumbs that fall from their master's table.*"

The reply was more perfect than our version represents. The new version has omitted the *yet* which so misleads, and substituted *for*. It is the woman's perfect agreement with the statement which is its charm; the readiness with which she makes this the reason of her claim. "That is precisely it, Lord; I

alas! am *not* one of Thy children. I can not come in amongst Thy favored disciples. I wish indeed I were. I am not worthy to sit at Thy table and to break bread with Thee. But, my Lord, I am the little dog creeping in under Thy table and looking up into Thy face and expecting Thee to let fall a crumb."

And at His feet she kneeled and looked up at Him, her eyes shining through her tears, her entreaty passing, as she spake, into an assured confidence. Then, as Jesus bent and looked down upon her, the love that seemed held back for a little while swept all barriers away. It shone in His face, and glistened in His eyes, and rang in the words, "*O woman, great is thy faith! be it unto thee even as thou wilt.*" Take anything: refusal is impossible to such a plea.

And, scarcely staying to thank Him, eager only for the little daughter, she hurried home "*and found the devil gone out.*" Ah! what a discovery! Think if to-day trembling mothers, burdened wives, poor little children, could go home and lift the latch and look within, no more to be frightened, no more to be

cursed, but to find "*the devil gone out.*" Jesus Christ is manifested for this—to destroy the works of the devil, to drive him out of the home.

Now, here is a blessed lesson for us all: How to take that which should silence us, and turn it into a song; how to find our triumph in that which threatened to trample us under foot. "What!" said the Lord, "wouldst thou have Me take away the children's bread for the little dogs?" "No, my Lord, but because I am a little dog I do look up for a crumb." Let us learn this exercise. Let the voices gather against us.

"What! wouldst *thou* have the blessings that are meant for good people, bestowed upon such a one as thou art—a sinner like thee?" Let the dead past rise up and clamor against us. Let the days bring their dark accounts through all the years. But at the feet of Jesus we will look into His face and cry: "Truth, Lord; I am a sinner, alas! most unworthy. But *because* I am a sinner, I need Thee as my Savior. The more my sins, the closer must I press to Thee, my Lord. The more fiercely the storm beats, the more am I driven for shelter underneath Thy cross. Truth,

Lord; I am a sinner, and I am come to Thee because Thou art *such a Savior!*"

Again comes the rebuff: "Wouldst *thou* venture to hope for any good? Thou art ignorant, full of mistakes, scarce able to open thy mouth to pray, finding at every turn some new mistake! Was ever any so foolish as thou art! Thinkest thou it is meet for such a one to seek these mysteries of religion?" Truth, indeed; I am most ignorant. But therefore do I come to Him, for He is *such a Savior*—just such a Savior as poor silly souls do need. The more foolish I am, the more will I look to my Lord to teach me; and the more room shall I have for learning.

"But thou art so weak; thinkest thou it is any use thy asking for anything? Thy name is fickleness, thy character is summed up in the word. Fleet-ing and changeful as the wind, how often thou hast been going to turn saint suddenly, and nothing has come of it! To-morrow found thee at the dead level of yesterday." True again; dreadfully true. And because I am so false and so forgetful, I am looking to Him to pity and help me. Because I am such a needy soul, I can do nothing without such a Savior. My very wants and weaknesses shall claim His pity,

and because I can do nothing without Him, I will find in Him my all.

“But what indeed, dost *thou* think that there is any hope, any chance for thee? Thy circumstances so peculiar; thy position so difficult; thy temptations so many; thine advantages so few! For everybody else, indeed, there might be some reason in coming to the Son of God. But for *thee*—what folly is it to expect that thou canst ever come to be other than thou art!” True, most true; I do look about me and tremble. I do look within and despair. And because I can look nowhere else with any hope, I do look to Jesus, and I will keep looking to Him. Because my circumstances are so full of hindrances, I must cast myself upon an almighty Savior. So I will kneel at His feet and look into His face, and say, “*Lord, help me,*” just because none else can. He is *such a Savior!*

And do all the voices seem to gather against thee in yet another cry? “*Thou art an outsider.* Birth, belonging, thoughts, heart, ways, all things thrust thee back from these religious people. What dost *thou* want here?” O, let thine heart be bold to make the

answer. Blessed be His name. I am *not* outside the great circle of His love. I am not outside the reach of His hand. I am not outside His power to help and save. I need know no more. Casting myself at His feet, I can pray, "Lord, help me," and the blessing shall surely be mine. Jesus is, indeed, *such a Savior!*

IX.

CHRIST AND THE WOMAN WHO HAD SPENT ALL.

“And a certain woman, . . . when she had heard of Jesus, came behind, and touched His garment.”
—St. Mark v, 25, 27.

JESUS is passing through the little fishing town, the center of a great crowd. Beside Him goes the ruler of the synagogue, his face all eagerness, dreading a moment's delay. On every side are those who throng and press the Savior; swarthy fishermen, who stoutly push their way; bold lads and maidens, who manage to hold their own; the Pharisees and scribes, caught in a crowd from which they can not escape, and shrinking with much disgust from contact with these “common people.” All the place is filled with the noise and excitement of the crowd. And there, in the midst, is Jesus, going as best He can with the troubled Jairus.

Then suddenly, abruptly, the whole scene changes. "*Behold, a woman,*" cries St. Matthew. Let the eyes be opened wide whenever in the Gospel narrative a woman comes near to Christ. Faith would be stripped of its most splendid triumphs; love would lose its tenderest scenes of devotion; courage would miss its noblest illustrations, if it were not for these stories of woman's contact with the Christ. The love that first bent over Him on earth, the last brave acts of devotion at His cross, the earliest greeting at His resurrection, were from a woman. At the sight of the Holy Child, old Simeon kindles into song; and then, as if life's purpose were fulfilled, he prays that he may depart in peace and go to his rest. But not so with Anna. Behold a woman who, though she is eighty-four years old, as soon as she finds Jesus, wants a new lease of life, and becomes the first of gospel preachers and home missionaries as she goes forth to tell of Him to all them in Jerusalem that looked for redemption. The disciples, we read, "marveled that He talked with a woman." But Jesus knew what He was doing. Behold her; no sooner does she find Christ than she becomes a missionary to the heathen, and brings a whole city to His feet to gladden the

heart of Jesus with a faith such as He had not found in Israel. It is a woman who delights the Lord with her resoluteness and ready wit, when, as He seemed to shrink from her with the words, "It is not meet to take the children's bread, and cast it to the dogs," she turned, all eager and trimphant, and cried, "Truth, Lord; but the dogs that are under the table may eat of the crumbs." It is a woman who renders Him the costliest gift and richest token of love. And yet the Church has ever been, and is still, half afraid of using this wondrous wealth of service which it possesses in the ministry of women. O for the Master's discernment and the Master's wisdom!

But what have we turned aside to see? A poor woman, white and withered. Here is no beauty, nothing heroic, nothing poetic. A sickly creature in a wretched home, talking despairingly of her complaints, and of the money she had spent upon the doctors, and how little they had done. Possibly a querulous and fault-finding soul; and it is not for us who have not suffered so to find fault with her on that account. What is there to look at here? Jairus's little daughter, the maiden of twelve, watched by

her mother's love, with the stately father pleading for her, is a picture for an artist; fit matter for a poem; the light and joy of her parents, the charm of the household, the pride of the village. But why cry, "Behold!" when there is nothing to see but coarse poverty, and ugly want, and wretchedness? "*Twelve years of age,*" we read of the maiden. "*Suffered for twelve years,*" we read of the other. Were ever twelve years less alike? For the maiden twelve years of sunny laughter; a lovely springtime bursting now into summer's fullness. But for the other, twelve years of want and woe; years that have left her wrinkled and withered, and penniless and despairing.

Ah! it is a sight worth stopping all this host to look at! Behold a woman who shows us that Jesus Christ has room in His heart, not only for gentle innocence and beauty, but for unlovely want, and for those who have no charm. Jesus Christ has not come only to save nice, amiable people, who are good enough to get some influence with heaven. He is come to find sad hearts everywhere; to help the needy everywhere; to stretch out hands of healing to all. This woman it is who becomes the picture and pattern of faith,

There are three stages in the story that it is well to notice, though it is a pity to break the narrative by dwelling upon them separately,—*hearing, coming, finding.*

“*A certain woman when she had heard of Jesus*”—it begins there.

Think of her sitting with some neighbor who gossips of the day’s event.

“Have you heard the news about this great Prophet of Nazareth? It is wonderful what He does.”

Blessed be God, even gossips may do some good when their theme is Jesus. What a blessed gossip was that whom the famous tinker overheard one sunny day near Bedford!

“No,” answers the sufferer, dolefully; “I never hear anything scarcely, and I never get any one in to see me. Who is He?”

“Well, from what they tell me, He must be the most wonderful Man that ever walked the earth. Some say that it is Elias come again; and some that it is the very Messiah.”

“And what does He do?” asks the sufferer in a languid and despairing way; for she has given up

expecting to hear of anything that can bring her any good.

“Do!” cries the other—“do! Why, *everything*. He opens blind eyes, and casts out devils, and cures fevers, and makes lepers whole. Why, they tell me that He actually bade the very winds and waves be still, and the storm was over instantly, and there was a great calm.”

Then the poor sufferer sighs—a sigh born half of desire and half of despair: “I suppose He is a long way off. In Jerusalem yonder, I suspect, so that a poor body like me has no chance of getting near Him.”

“Nay,” says the other. “He is *here*; He landed this very hour. As I came on I met Jairus the ruler hastening down to find Him; for they tell me that the little daughter is very ill, and almost at her last gasp.”

“But I suppose He charges a great deal, does n’t He? You see, I am so poor that there is no chance for me!” cries the sufferer again.

“Charges!” laughs her neighbor; “no, indeed; He never will take anything at all.”

“But, O dear! I am afraid of these doctors,” the

poor woman says, shaking her head; "you see I have suffered so much from their medicines and rough ways."

Then the other explains: "Ah, bless you, this Prophet gives no medicine at all, and He heals with a touch, old and young; no matter what ails any, He makes them whole."

"And you say *He* is passing through the street this very hour?"

"Yes," says the neighbor.

"Then I will just go and be made whole."

When she heard of Jesus she came, of course. What else should she do? If she had sat hearing about Jesus all the days of her life, would that have done her any good? If she had been never so interested in the story, and had wept with gladness at the wonderful words, what should all that have availed her?

She said, "I will go forth and find Him; for if I do but touch His clothes, I shall be made whole."

It is an awful thing to get into the habit of hearing about Jesus until we come to think of Him as nothing but a text for sermons, a subject on which to hang our Sunday services; never so much as

thought of a Blessed Presence who comes to light up our lives; as if He were no real Help, no healing Power; only a sound. There is an awful possibility of hearing about Jesus until we never think of doing anything else but hear about Him. Well may we be troubled for these, the preacher's perplexity and his despair. The more interested they are, the more they will listen and be content with listening. The more they enjoy the service, the more satisfied are they with it. They hear, but they do not *come* to Him. They know all that we can tell them, and yet they do not know *Him*. Let this madness end. When she heard of Jesus she came, saying, "*If I may but touch the hem of His garment, I shall be made whole*"—I—I—O blessed boldness! Faith's strength lies in that individuality—I—I—I—"If I may but touch His clothes." Of course, if He can heal ten thousand others He is not come only that I may *hear about Him*; *He is come to heal me*. If He is a mighty Prophet, why should I be shut out in my sorrow and suffering?

Will you think it, believe it, say it now in your heart, "*If I may but touch the hem of His garment, I shall be made whole?*"

But I can think that the gossip who had brought the tidings is somewhat frightened at the poor woman's proposal herself to go forth to Jesus; the preacher is not always full of faith in his own message.

"What! *you* go out—*now!* just as you are!—and to touch *Him!* No, no. That would never do. Of course, it is all very well for this Jairus; you see, he is a great man and has much influence. But *you*, so poor and all unknown! I will tell you what you might do. Go and see the Ruler to-morrow some time, and ask him to speak to this Jesus of Nazareth for you; and then perhaps this great Prophet may hear what you have got to say."

Then I think the sufferer gets indignant. "To-morrow! No, indeed. He may be gone by then. I will go; and if I do but touch His clothes, I shall be made whole."

The very pattern of faith is this. If a Prophet have come to bless and heal any, surely He will be readiest to help those who need Him most. Her helplessness, her poverty, her friendlessness, were they not all claims upon His pity? "*When she heard of Him.*" Ah! if she had heard of Him what we have

heard—that He who was rich, for our sakes became poor; that He was born as the little Babe, and laid in the coarse manger; that He wrought as the lowly carpenter—would she not have cried, “Nay, my poverty and lowliness will command His sympathy and help?” What if she had heard of Him that He had come to lay down His life, in all shame and agony, for our sake, how bold should she have grown then! If she had heard Himself saying anything so exquisitely tender as this, “Come unto Me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest,” what then could have stayed her? If she had known of Him all that we know, would she not have cried triumphantly, “*Why, blessed be His name, He will thank me for coming; if I but touch His clothes, I shall be made whole?*”

Any way is right that leads us to Jesus if we do but come. Everything is of no avail without coming. His great love knows nothing of stately etiquette. Seek Him, and you are bound to find Him. Let the heart go forth to look for Him, and, turn which way it will, it can not fail to find Him.

But once again the neighbor suggests: “Well, if you will go, do not go now. It is a very inconvenient

time. You see, He is just on His way to the house of Jairus. The little daughter is dying, and if you hinder Him now, it might be a dreadful thing; the little maiden might be dead."

"Ah," says the woman, "I must go now! I may never have another chance. I will not hinder Him. I will take care of that. The little maiden shall not suffer. I will just get in behind Him and touch the hem of His garment, and I shall be made whole."

Again, the very pattern of faith. The Lord Jesus has but one time for salvation; one time only is there when we can be quite sure that it is not inconvenient to Him, and that He will be willing to welcome us. He has announced the time plainly, and it is surely best to go at the time that He has appointed. Now—*TO-DAY is the day of salvation; NOW is the accepted time.* There are privileges and indulgences that are free to men only on certain days; there are blessings limited to certain occasions; rites and arrangements dependent on circumstances. But the Lord Jesus has not made the tremendous issues of our salvation hang upon the convenience of others. The hour of your seeking is the hour of God's willingness.

But the neighbor has not done yet, and whilst

the poor sufferer is making ready to go, there comes yet another appeal: "Do stay, and listen to reason. It is utterly useless for you to go off like this. *You will never get near Him.* When I came, the people were waiting for Him from all the country-side. I should have staid myself, but I was afraid of being crushed to death. And a poor, weak creature like you, you will not have a chance. You had much better stay at home and wait for a quiet time when you can make sure of getting to Him."

Soul—my dialogue is no fancied one. Is it not thus that unbelief speaks within thee? "It is all very well for some folks, they have so many things in their favor. But look at the hindrances that are all about me; look at my company; look at my business; look down into the week and see the swarms of things that there are to come and push me back from Christ. It is no use *my* trying to get to Jesus. I must wait until circumstances are more favorable.

"Well," she says, "*I can but try.* It is surely worth trying." And forth she goes. And now, as she comes out of the narrow way, the crowd is passing. She is crushed here and pushed thither, elbowed backward and thrust onward, until she is beginning to

despair, when suddenly right in front of her, there stands the mighty Prophet, the blue ribbon that fringed His robe hanging within her reach. Forth went that wasted finger and thumb and touched it, and instantly the tide of blessed health came bounding through her. *She was made whole.*

Ah! blessed be God, so it ever is; if any soul *will* find Christ, there is no power on earth or in hell that shall hinder. O seeker for Christ, no matter how dull thou art, how blundering, if thou wilt but seek Him earnestly herein, failure is impossible! Here God's own love is on thy side to prosper thee. "*Seek, and ye shall find.*"

She touched Him. Many thronged and pressed Him; every moment the crowd surged about Him; but here was one who put out the hand and *took hold of Him.* She found the healing virtue.

It is the very picture of faith in its simplicity. We hear of Christ very often; we often come into His presence; we may in our eagerness even *throng* Him and press Him; yet there may be no *contact*, no *claiming*. In hearing the Word we may be interested, filled with gracious purposes, filled with good

resolutions, and yet all dies away and is ineffectual because we do not touch Him; the hand of our want does not go forth to claim Him as our own. In prayer and in the round of our religious life we may go through the forms, devoutly, sincerely; and yet we may miss the healing virtue because there is not the faith which takes Him for our need. It is precisely at this point that we so often fail. Now, whilst this thought is with you, be resolved that this mistake shall not be yours. *Now* boldly claim Him as your own; your Helper; your Healer; your Savior; your All.

We linger over the scene a moment longer, that we may see *Faith's welcome and success*.

If the neighbor had followed the woman to see how she fared, think of her watching from some corner just on the edge of the crowd. The whole host is stopped. All are hushed, as Jesus turns and asks, "*Who touched Me?*"

"There," says the neighbor, "I told her so. The great Prophet will be very angry at one like her, taking such a liberty with Him!" Then in the hush Peter's explanation is heard: "Master, the people

throng Thee and crush Thee, and sayest Thou, Who touched Me?" But Jesus stands still and looks quietly about Him.

"O dear! what will He say? what will He do?" thinks the neighbor. And whilst He was looking thus there is another comer. "Ah! I told her so; the worst time she could have chosen." And, pushing in through the crowd, there comes the servant to Jairus: "Trouble not the Master; the daughter is dead!"

"There; now you see what comes of your thrusting yourself upon Him at a time like this. The little maiden might have lived if you had not come troubling the Prophet just now."

Ah! there was no help for it. The woman creeps like a guilty thing, with head hung down and tearful eyes and a great sob choking her—caught in the act. She just fell down before Him and told Him all about it. Then the crowd was hushed to hear what this righteous Prophet would say. Angry? No. O, what tender love filled all that face! He laid His hand upon her in gentlest blessing. He called her by a sweet name of endearment: "Daughter, fear not; be of good heart, thy faith hath made thee

whole." Intruding! Unwelcome! No, indeed. Never was a more gracious, a more loving word spoken to any that ever came. O, be sure of a like welcome, whoever thou art, if thou wilt come to Him!

And inconvenient! Nay, indeed; her coming was no hindrance to Jairus, but a most blessed help. The little daughter was dead; and whilst at one side there stood the messenger, saying, "Trouble not the Master," on the other side stood the Lord Himself saying to the woman, "*Thy faith hath made thee whole.*" And Jairus turned to see that face aglow with health; the poor sufferer erect and strong; and it was with a new meaning that he heard the words of Jesus, "Believe only, and thy daughter shall live." So did the poor sufferer lift up the faith of Jairus against death itself. For ourselves, for Christ Himself, for everybody else, the best thing we can do is to come boldly and take Him as our own. Now let the touch, the contact, be yours. The hand of faith thrust forth to Him shall find the healing virtue waiting still as mighty as of old; thy faith shall make thee whole.

X.

CHRIST AND THE BLIND MAN OF JERICHO.

“Jesus, Thou Son of David, have mercy on me.”—
Mark x, 47.

It was a stirring scene in the crowded gateway of Jericho. The presence of Jesus was enough to move the whole city, and to bring great crowds who were eager to see Him; but besides these who pushed and surged about Him, there was a multitude of pilgrims going up to the Passover. The custom was for many to journey together, both for the pleasure of the company and as a protection against the robber bands and brigands, who so infested this road that it was called “the red road,” or “the road of blood.” The vast crowds, the excitement of the scene, the noise and ado of the people, pushing and thronging through the narrow gate, all made this the very last occasion for a miracle of healing. It was difficult to get at Jesus; it was unreasonable to stop Him in

such a tumult; it was unlikely that He would hear anybody at a time like this. Blessed be His name, all times are good to come to Jesus. We can never come at an inconvenient hour; He is never too busy. Never, never, never can we come and find Him unable or unwilling to welcome and bless us.

Near the gateway, just a little out of the crowd, sits blind Bartimeus begging. Beggars are usually gossips; they have not much else to do, and the gateway was the place of news; so there can be little doubt that Bartimeus had heard of the Prophet whose fame had gone throughout the land. I can think how that one day there comes one all dust-stained, returning from Jerusalem, and how he rests in the shadow of the gate.

“Ah, Bartimeus, you here still?”

“Of course,” says Bartimeus, “where else should I be? Blind men see as much at home as any where. Where have you been?”

“Been in Jerusalem. And what do you think I saw there?”

“Well, nothing very wonderful, I suspect.”

“But I did. I saw something that would suit you well.”

"I dare say," says Bartimeus; "you would not have to go far to find that. What was it?"

"I saw this great Prophet of Nazareth. Some say that He is Elias, and some say that He is the very Christ Himself. Certainly, never man spake like this Man."

"I wish I could hear Him," says Bartimeus, with a sigh.

"And what do you think He did? You would never guess."

"You may as well tell me then. What was it?"

"Why, *He opened the eyes of a man that was born blind!*"

Then Bartimeus turned up his sightless face eagerly.

"Opened a blind man's eyes!" he cried.

"Yes, and has done many another wonderful work."

The whole soul of the man was stirred. The hands were stretched out as if in entreaty. "Do you think He will ever come this way?" he asked solemnly.

"He may do so."

"*I do wish He would!*" cried Bartimeus fervently.

And from that day we can think how the blind man dreamed of this Jesus, and longed that He would once come near to Jericho. What visions he had of that hour of healing! We can think how eagerly he asked of those who came from Jerusalem where He was and what He did; how he treasured and repeated to himself the words that others had heard from the lips of this Jesus, and how he listened to the story of His miracles. Day and night one longing filled his soul: O, if He would but pass this way! Well, it was good to hear of Jesus; and yet it was sad. His blindness seemed all the harder to bear as he thought of what others had found. Here were some who had gone from Jericho to be healed, and *he* had none to help him! O, if he only lived in Jerusalem! Then he could get to the feet of the Prophet. It was hard to be so far away; hard to be so helpless; to have so many things against him,—poverty as well as blindness!

Is not this the very picture of many? You come Sunday after Sunday to hear of Jesus; you delight to hear of Him, and thank God as you hear of what He has done for others. The age of miracles is not past, and where Jesus Christ is, there are miracles as

great and glorious as ever. Blind eyes are opened, and devils are cast out, and lepers are cleansed, and the poor have the gospel preached unto them. But you, alas! you sit like the blind man, hearing of it all, but it all seems so far beyond your reach. You are blind, and are not able to understand these things that others find so readily. You are peculiarly situated, and have none of the advantages and helps that others have. Everything seems to be against you. And you think within yourself that there is nothing for you but to sit still and long that help may come one day. This is no dead story of years ago. How many here must say, "*It is I.*"

Now comes the day when all the city is filled with excitement and ado. "What is it all about?" asks the blind man of one and another. At last he gets an answer, "*Jesus of Nazareth passeth by.*"

So the great Prophet is within the blind man's reach. He will make the most of the opportunity. "*Jesus of Nazareth passeth by!*" What music was ever half so sweet? What hope, what possibilities, lay in the words! He who healed all that came unto Him was so near. Well may the blind man lift up his voice. Suddenly, above the tumult, sharp and

clear there rings the cry, "*Thou Son of David, have mercy upon me!*"

My brother, *Jesus is here*. He Himself is come; He who has blessed and saved ten thousand thousand souls is within your reach; He who is able to save to the uttermost all that come to God by Him is come to save *you*. Is your longing to find no utterance? Is your sad heart to have no comfort? Is your life to find no strength and joy? Is your sickness never to be healed? Speak to Him. Let your heart go forth to Him. "*Thou Son of David, have mercy upon me!*"

But those about the beggar rebuked him. "Hold thy peace," said they.

"Whatever for?" he asked.

"Because thou art only a beggar. It is presumption to think that this great Prophet whom all the world is flocking to hear, and whom the people are going to make the King of Israel, should look upon such a one as thou art."

"No, no," saith Bartimeus; "the poorer I am, the more am I to be pitied. Thou Son of David, have mercy upon me!"

“Hold thy noise; He is busy talking to the people.”

“Well,” said Bartimeus, “I want to hear Him talking. Think how much I am losing. Have mercy, Thou Son of David, have mercy upon me!”

“Hold thy noise,” said another; “thy case is hopeless,—a man so old as thou art; what is the good of thy crying out?”

“If He can save others, He can save me!” cried the blind man. “Have mercy on me, Thou Son of David, have mercy upon me.”

He could do nothing but cry aloud. The leper could come springing in with his cry of “Unclean,” and fall at the feet of Jesus. The poor woman could come in the press and silently take hold of the hem of His garment. But in the case of Bartimeus neither his hands nor his feet could help him; so he must depend all the more upon his cry, “*Thou Son of David, have mercy upon me.*”

What think you if he had spent the time in wondering as to the process of healing, and was so taken up with thinking of it that Jesus was gone before he spoke? What if he had been arguing with himself about a case like that of a man at the Pool of Siloam:

“You see, the clay there is very peculiar; and no doubt it is very rich in medicinal properties. And, of course, the Pool of Siloam is so well known; and being in the Holy City, it has a special efficacy for the eyes, no doubt.” It is thus that thousands spend their time, and they let the great Savior pass. They are groping about for faith. O, if they only had faith, and if they could but repent! Dear, dear, what is to be done? Why, if this man had neither clay nor Pool of Siloam, Jesus must pity him and help him all the more. “Thou Son of David, have mercy upon me.” Friend, if you have less than anybody else, be all the bolder in crying for help and mercy. Your need is all the greater; your claim is all the stronger. “Thou Son of David, have mercy upon me.” To-day resolve to go exactly on these lines. Say within yourself: “Well, I will go to Jesus. If I can bring nothing else, I can cry with persistent and importunate entreaty. *I will keep on keeping on.*” This is the one secret of success,—this downright earnestness in prayer that will not be silenced; that will take no denial. Let your whole faith and hope be set on Jesus, and let your heart go out to Him in its entreaty, “*Thou Son of David, have mercy upon me.*”

And now let us see how the blind man fared.

“And Jesus stood still.” O wondrous power of prayer! Of old time Joshua commanded the sun to stand still. But here a blind beggar arrests the steps of Him who bade the sun to be. And what a moment for Jesus to stand still! Read what is written before this incident. “And they were in the way going up to Jerusalem; and Jesus went before them: and they were amazed; and as they followed, they were afraid. And He took again the twelve, and began to tell them what things should happen unto Him, saying, Behold, we go up to Jerusalem; and the Son of man shall be delivered unto the chief priests, and unto the scribes; and they shall condemn Him to death, and shall deliver Him to the Gentiles; and they shall mock Him, and shall scourge Him, and shall spit upon Him, and shall kill Him; and the third day He shall rise again.” If ever there was a moment when the Lord Jesus Christ might have been all taken up in His own sorrows, it was now, feeling grief and shame and agony such as none had ever known. But lo! the blind man’s cry reaches His ear, and all is forgotten but that man’s sorrow, and all the heart is full of eagerness to pity and heal him. And what

now? now that He has entered into His glory? now that He is set down at the right hand of the Father, as if having leisure to listen and heed the cry of the sad heart?

Jesus stood still. Then see what follows the incident. He is going on His triumphal procession, hailed as King and heralded with shouts of "Hosanna." The eager people are ready to cast their robes to decorate His path, and to strew them with the palm branches. But all the greatness and glory are forgotten at the blind man's cry. It arrests and holds Him. No greatness, no high glory, can separate thee, dear heart, from thy Lord. "*And He commanded him to be called.*" The blind beggar was everything now. His name was on everybody's lips. All the people that had reproved him were quite eager now to have the honor of being associated with Him; a score of hands were reached out to Him, and a host of voices called, "Be of good cheer, He calleth thee." No more a blind beggar, he is the very foremost man in Jericho. O soul, Jesus Christ holds thee so dear that He will make much, very much, of thee! And when He is thine He can quickly turn the hearts of those that are against thee to befriend

and bless thee. Led by half a dozen hands, as the crowd falls back before him, everybody makes way for him as if he had been a prince, and he stands face to face with the Lord. And Jesus said unto him, "*What wilt thou that I shall do unto thee?*"

Look at it; a blind beggar and the King of Glory. And lo, the King doth set all the wisdom and power and love of God at the disposal of the beggar. O, this is His love; He gives Himself to us with all His power to be our Friend and Helper, and sets Himself at our service. "*What wilt thou that I should do unto thee?*"

"Lord," cried the blind man, "*that I might receive my sight!*" And immediately he received his sight. The glory of the earth and heaven, and the beauty of Jesus Himself, flashed in upon his soul. "Go thy way," said Jesus; "thy faith hath made thee whole."

This is the gospel. If it means anything at all, it means that Jesus Christ is come into the world to do IMPOSSIBLE things. What is the good of the Son of man coming into the world, if He can not help blind beggars, and undo the misery and curse of the world? What is He come for, the glorious Son

of God, having all power in heaven and in earth, if He can not make drunkards sober, and cast out devils of lust and pride, and heal broken hearts, and mend ruined homes, and open blind eyes to the vision of Himself and to the love of the Father and to the blessedness of heaven? If the gospel of Jesus Christ is a thing of words and names only, of theories and creeds, a mere text for endless sermons, a game of definitions for doctors of divinity,—who wants it? Let it go. Life is too real, too short, too tragic, too miserable, too awful, for any such trifling. Let the dead preacher bury the dead gospel, and himself with it, if he will. But if there is a power that can uplift and heal men, that can end the misery and bitterness, make room for it. Blessed be God, there is. “*Jesus of Nazareth passeth by.*”

XI.

CHRIST AND THE BLIND MAN OF JERUSALEM.

“And as Jesus passed by, He saw a man that was blind from his birth.”—St. John ix, 1.

It was very wonderful that Jesus should have seen the man at such a time. The story is so beautiful that we can not resist the temptation of going back to the beginning of that Sabbath-day. Jesus had come down from the Mount of Olives, and entered into the Temple. It was a great contrast. On the mount with His disciples all was calm and holy. There was rest and peace, there was communion with the Father and fellowship with His followers. Below there were the thronging multitudes; there was certain to be conflict and quarrel with the Pharisees. The Temple itself roused the indignation of Christ by all kinds of defilements, and the services were degraded into wretched traditions about mint,

anise, and cummin, whilst over all there was an utter blindness to the great law of love. Besides all this, it was on the Sabbath-day that His works of healing excited the fiercest wrath of the rulers, and brought Him into the gravest of peril of His life. "Master," they might have said, "it is good, it is better to be here; better for Thee and better for us. For this day let us tarry here." Bethany, too, was close at hand, with the charm of that dear home where such true love and devotion waited eager to minister to Him. Why not spend a restful Sabbath there? His coming down is a revelation of the inner life of Christ. "I must work the works of Him that sent Me." His delight was in the Father's will. To it He had surrendered His whole being. In it He found His rest and strength and joy. So is it that early on the Sabbath morning He leaves the quiet hill-side, and, passing through the gate of the city, is once more amidst the crowds which had come up to the Feast of Tabernacles, and who, from the first moment of His appearance, would throng about Him with a curious wonder.

And now that Jesus has entered into His glory, do not let us think that He is gone up those heights

to rest amidst the raptures of heaven and the high hallelujahs of the angels. His great love and eagerness to help still thrust Him forth into the midst of men. He comes to us—blessed be His name!—as He came to them of old time. Let our hearts greet Him with truest love.

Already there is a commotion, a crowd making its way toward Jesus. A group of scribes and Pharisees thrust a woman, degraded and unveiled, into His presence. She stands trembling, her face buried in her hands, shame and grief and terror struggling within her; about her the clamoring accusers, with eyes that flash with indignant rage, and fingers pointed at her in scorn. “Master, Moses commanded that such an offender be stoned?” It was a crafty question, and a hush fell on the crowd. If Jesus condemned the woman, the popular feeling might be aroused against Him. If He did not condemn her, He would seem to set Himself against Moses and the law. Jesus bent down and seemed to be writing on the ground. Once again came the angry clamor, “Master, Moses commanded that she should be stoned. What sayest Thou?” Lifting Himself up, with eyes that searched them through—ah, well He knew these

men who were so angry at another's sin, hounding this woman to death—He said: "Let him that is without sin among you cast the first stone." And again He stooped as if writing on the ground. It was a lightning flash that lit up every man's memory and every man's conscience; and they, convicted, went out one by one, and Jesus was left alone with the woman. How skillful, how brave, how chivalrous the defense! Earth's bravest knight and truest gentleman was Jesus Christ of Nazareth. "Doth no man condemn thee?" asked Jesus. "No man, Lord," she said in wonder. Then came words like the dawning of heaven upon her soul: "Neither do I condemn thee; go thy way and sin no more."

So the day begins. Linger over it a moment longer to notice that it is lawful to stone a sinner on the Sabbath-day. Before the day is much older there is danger of another stoning. Another interview with the authorities, enraged at having been thus baffled and silenced, ended in their taking up stones to stone Jesus. But He passed through the midst of them and went down the Temple steps.

"And as Jesus passed by, He saw a blind man from his birth." At such a time it was very wonder-

ful that He should see anything but the way out. His life was in peril. The plot was thickening, the pursuers were more than ever determined to murder Him. At such times men are likely to see only what concerns themselves and their own safety. It is a blessed proof of the way in which that most gracious Heart lay open to all the sorrow and needs of men. Find out what people see, and you will know what they are. People mostly see what they look for; and they look for what they want. It is curious to listen to the account of what people have seen; how some saw a dress, and some a face, and some saw nothing. "He looked for the worms, I for the gods," was the complaint of a certain singer. *Jesus saw a blind man.* Some people are very blind to blind men. There is, you know a color-blindness, that can not discern certain colors. There is, too, an *inner* color-blindness, that never sees sorrow, need, sickness, or any other adversity. It looks on the bright side of things by looking away from all that is wretched. Ah, never was there such an eye for sad hearts as Jesus Christ's! Once seeing the blind man, He can go no farther. Pharisees and perils are alike forgotten. Pity saw her opportunity, and she could not

be denied. O, what a Christ is this! Well may His name be called Wonderful.

And the only Christianity that is worth the name is that which makes us like Him. So that, however we be driven, however harassed, however threatened, there is within the soul a great atmosphere where love dwelleth. In this great London of ours, with its turmoil of the streets, the hurry of the thousands on its pavements, the roll and rumble of its traffic, yet you know how God's sky bends over it, and God's great sun shines upon it, and God's kindly stars do look down upon it. That is the very purpose of Christ's coming,—to open up in our narrow, little, earthly, busy lives a whole heaven of pity, of love, of gracious help.

The Master saw a blind man. *What did the disciples see?* His face was full of pity only; theirs was full of a curious prying. With them it was a case for dissection, a poor body for their anatomy, and they began at once with the scalpel knife. "Master, who did sin, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?" Alas! how full the world is of people who are ready to cast stones at those who are down—stones that may break no bones, but that do bruise

spirits and break hearts! What a strange lack of feeling! And what an extraordinary notion! Bad enough to be blind, and bad enough to be poor; but to be both might well move our pity. But no; to be poor shows that he is bad; to be blind shows that he must be very bad. It is a horrible notion! Yet it lives and thrives to-day. Would not any stranger coming into the midst of us suppose that the rich people must be good—born good? It is the poor who are so bad—so very bad. Whom are city missionaries for, and tract distributors, and district visitors, and Bible-women? All for the poor; until one might think that the Scripture which says that the poor have the gospel preached to them, implies that the rich do not need it. Has it not been said in scores of good books that the subject was born of “poor but pious parents?” Why, indeed, the *but*? “Of rich but pious parents,” is a phrase I never heard, and yet it were the greater wonder. Cold-blooded discussion of great social problems that involve the lives of men and women and little children is bad enough; but ten thousand times worse is it when good people stand tiptoe and look down from their lofty superiority with cold steel eyes and lips of scorn, and

talk of the poor as “a drunken, lazy lot.” It is enough to provoke men and women to curse the very name of religion. Nothing could be more unlike that blessed Savior who saved the world by loving it. What a gulf is there oftentimes between the Master and His followers!

Very notable is the answer of the Lord Jesus: “Neither hath this man sinned nor his parents; this blindness has not come from sin, but for your sakes, that his blindness may open your eyes; for you are blind except this blind man give you sight.” A Divine homeopathy, like curing like. I constantly have my eyes opened by blind men. I never know, indeed, that I have any eyes until I see a blind man; then I go on my way thanking God for this wondrous gift of sight. “*That he may show forth the works of God.*” Who most enriched the world when Christ was upon earth, the rich man or the beggars? Think how infinitely poorer all the ages had been if, when Christ came, there had been no sick, no suffering, no need, in the world. What depths of tenderness, what hope for all men, what mighty helpfulness, what revelations of Christ, are ours to-day, because there sat of old blind beggars and such needy sufferers!

Surely, when men are rewarded according to their service, these shall have great recompense.

And now let us turn from the gracious Master to the blind man. He is a shrewd, clever fellow: the loss of his eyes has sharpened his wits, and he has a bold tongue. I want to sit by his side for a little while and talk to him. Poor man! Overhead that deep blue Syrian sky, and up against it sharp and clear, the fretted pinnacles of the Temple; here, too, the crowded porticoes, the steps thronged with the gay figures of the crowd; the colors and shapes of things; the light of faces; the varied interests and bits of life,—and all this lost to him. Yours is a great affliction, my friend.

I knew such a blind man once—sharp, shrewd, clever. I was staying at a little village on the Cornish coast, and the good man of the house sat in the settle by the fire. I was anxious to make his acquaintance, and, seeing he was blind, I said, with as much sympathy as I could, “Yours is a great affliction, my friend.”

To my astonishment he got up and turned upon me angrily, and denied it utterly. “No; it is not,” said he; “not a bit.” And he groped his way out.

His wife hurried in to apologize and explain. "O, sir, I am so sorry; I meant to have asked you not to say anything about my husband's blindness. He always gets so angry. You know, *he thinks eyes are such stupid things*. And he can do a great deal more without his eyes than many men can do with them."

That blind man opened my eyes. I watched henceforth most carefully, and I think I learned this: that, generally speaking, a blind man is not conscious of his infirmity. A deaf man sees that he is deaf, but a blind man can not see that he is blind. As the result of my altered manner I got an invitation to address some two or three hundred blind people. I was almost shocked at the reason for asking me. "He won't pity us." Not pity the poor blind! Why, it was the appeal that had often diverted my earliest pence from some indulgence. But I knew what they meant, and was glad that they had discerned my knowledge; the blind only know that they are blind by being pitied.

The blind man is conscious, of course, of many wants, of many difficulties; it may be of sorrows and

of needs; but he does not accept them as the result of his blindness so much as the natural course of things. And now I can quite think if I had sat down by the side of this blind man of olden time, and had begun to talk to him, and had got his confidence, he might have turned the sightless eyes towards me, and have said: "Shall I tell you what I think? Well, you know, I think that it is all nonsense talking about eyes and the glories of vision, and all that sort of thing. *I don't believe there are any such things as eyes. Prove it!* What are eyes?"

"Well," I answer as well as I can; "eyes are the organs of sight, by which we possess the sense of seeing."

"Seeing? What is seeing? How do you define it?"

What can I say? I do not know that anybody can define sight to a blind man; and of course my silence is a complete proof that he is right and that there are no such things as eyes. Then in the complacent tone of victory, he adds: "No, my dear sir; I have dreams sometimes and fancies, you know—products of indigestion, perhaps—but *nobody ever did see*; the thing is impossible."

It is a very picture of thousands, tens of thousands, about us.

To you and me, thank God, the presence and help of the Heavenly Father are as real as the earth is real. Life to us is lit up with His love sure as the ground on which we tread, and bright as the heaven under which we dwell. We are arched about with His care, compassed with His favor as with a shield. To us the Lord Jesus is a most real Presence, a gracious Friend and Brother, our blessed Master, whom it is our delight to serve; to commune with Him is as easy and as natural as breathing. And yet there are hosts of men to whom all this is but a sound that conveys no definite idea. God is not a reality, only a name; and Jesus Christ is but One who lived long ago. Religion moves their scorn. They can not see it, and therefore they can not believe it.

A man born blind, who does not believe in eyes: what are you going to do for him? It is no good tormenting him with blisters and homemade ointments and cruel operations. When a man has got no eyes it is no good trying to open them. And what is the use of getting eloquent men to describe the marvels of the eye? Read him, if you will, a masterly treatise

on optics. But what of that? It is not *light* that the man wants, but *eyes*. Arguments, theories, philosophies as to the plan of salvation, evidences of Christianity, explanations of faith,—what do these avail when men are blind, born blind? Can we do nothing to help them, then? Yes, certainly, something; only let it be the right thing. Call Bartimeus. He is with the crowd about the Master somewhere. “Here, Bartimeus, is a case for you. A blind man sits there just above the steps. Have a word with him.”

And Bartimeus sits beside him and begins to talk. “Do you know that I was born blind like you?”

“And what are you now?” asks the beggar.

“What am I now?” cries Bartimeus. “Why, I have got as good a pair of eyes as ever man had. I can see everything.”

“And you were *born blind*?”

“Yes, indeed, and was blind for years. There are many people in the city who knew me when I was a poor beggar down in Jericho.”

“What did you do?”

“I heard that Jesus of Nazareth was passing through the place. They had told me of the wonders

that He had done ; so that when He came near enough to hear I cried out to Him to have mercy upon me. And He stopped, just as if I had been a prince, and called me over to Him, and gave me this glorious gift of sight in a moment. He is in the city now, and will be sure to pass this way. And He will do as much for you as He did for me."

That would set the blind man thinking, hoping ; yes, longing. The masterpiece of argument is what Jesus Christ has done for us. The greatest power we have to help others is in telling them what Jesus Christ has done for us. "*One thing I know, whereas I was blind, now I see.*"

And now Jesus is beside him. Do you notice that the Master did not ask him if he would be made whole or anything else ? Perhaps it was that Jesus feared the man's readiness to argue, and He knew how easily the chance might be lost. He stooped and moistened the clay into an ointment, and laid it on his eyes, and said unto him, "*Go, wash in the pool of Siloam.*" He gave him no promise. He made the clay. Why ? Partly, I think, because He would protest once more against the strangling tyranny to which the Pharisees had brought the notion of the

Sabbath, that whilst it was lawful to stone Jesus Himself to death on that day, they said it was not lawful for a man *to anoint his eyes with eye-salve*, because that was too much like work! He made clay as a sign, I think, to those who had eyes to see it, that as at the first He made the man out of the dust, so now out of the dust He could restore that which the man lacked. It was the proof of the Creator, the Light of the World. Perhaps there was a whisper of hope in it, that as through the clay there came the healing power, so through the cold dead clay shall come the perfect wholeness of the body, and that thus one day shall our blind eyes be opened, that we, too, may see the King in His beauty. And yet again a gracious hint that though He work whose word made the heavens, yet will He stoop to earth to find an instrument of service, and in the weakest and commonest of us, if only passive in His hands, He will find that which will be made of great use and blessing.

At once up rose the blind man, and, followed by a crowd of people, he makes his way to the Pool of Siloam. It was a noble faith. He might have begun to tease himself with a great number of questions:

"I have tried all sorts of things; whatever good can these plasters of mud do me? That man from Jericho had nothing like this! If this Jesus can heal me at all, why does He not heal me at once?" No! Christ said: "Go, wash," and away he went and washed—AND CAME SEEING. Ah! I should like to have met him then. I do not wonder that it made a stir throughout the city. It must have seemed as if heaven came in at his eyes. O, the glories of the sky, the streets, the faces—everything! I think I see him, rather afraid to trust this new faculty; habit making him still stretch out the hand and cautiously put down the foot, yet intoxicated with this bliss of seeing. He does not want any argument now. Every sense and feeling of the man, the great world that lay about him, the sky above him, everything that his eyes rested upon, testified to the completeness of the change. His neighbors were not sure that it was the man. *Is this he that sat and begged?* "Yes," said some. "No," said others. "He is like him," said others still. "*I am* he!" cried the man, with the confidence of one who ought to know. So sudden, so complete, so glorious, is the blessing which Jesus can bestow.

And now this same Jesus Christ is here. It were a cruel thing to tell of miracles like this if Jesus be gone. All time is darker and all the life emptier if we can only look back upon the memory of such a One. *Jesus is here*; not fleeing from the hands of His enemies, but tarrying in the house of His friends. Where is the soul burdened with sorrow, some sore need thrusting you away alone in darkness and grief? Ah! this is the one—the very one—that Jesus always sees. This is the one that He can not pass by. From thy need, dear soul, pluck hope; and let expectation look out from thine eyes because thou are blind.

“Ah, but,” say you, “I am so dark!”

So, indeed, was this man. And if the Lord says, “I am the Light of this World,” where shall I expect to find Him but where He is most needed, and where darkness spreads her dreariest night?

“But I have so many disadvantages.”

So, indeed, had he who was born blind. But every disadvantage was a hold and claim upon the help and pity of the Lord Jesus.

“But I can not pray.”

Well, I do not find that this man *said* a prayer;

but he looked a more effectual prayer than his lips could ever utter. He sat there, and just let Jesus look down upon his misery and need, whilst he looked up his longing. Think you not that the sightless face turned toward the light was more than any words?

“But I do not understand the way of salvation.”

Most certainly this man did not, with the plaster of clay on each eye. But he did not think of the method, *only of the Master*, and did what he was told. Jesus is here; speak to Him; long for Him; expect Him; put out the hand, and claim Him as your own. Tell Him: “I have heard that Thou art the Friend and Savior of sinners. I claim Thy pity; I need Thy help; Lord, save me!” He will, He can not but save. We hold Him by the omnipotence of His own most gracious word: “HIM THAT COMETH UNTO ME I WILL IN NO WISE CAST OUT.”

XII.

CHRIST THE FRIEND OF THE SORROWFUL.

"And went and told Jesus."—St. Matthew xiv, 12.

THIS fourteenth chapter is very wonderful in many aspects. Full of varied incidents, it is perhaps most striking by the contrast which is presented by its two sections. The first is full of Herod, and the second is full of Jesus; the earthly king, and the King of heaven.

Herod the king laid hold on John and put him in prison. It is a desert place indeed; within the dungeon, bound and watched, there is the wasted prisoner, plotted against by Herodias, and scarcely daring to call his head his own. Then comes the king's birthday. Sound the trumpets, let the flags flutter in the breeze, set the banqueting hall in festal array, bring out the richest and daintiest to-day. Bid the lords and chief captains gather to feast with the

king. Have you heard the news? The king has given a birthday gift to Herodias,—John the Baptist's head on a charger. Come away; who would linger in such a place? Treachery, murder, wrong,—are not these the stains that defile the walls of palaces? Do not these make up the record of earth's kings?

Then comes the contrast. Again a multitude; not of lords and chief captains, but of men and women and little lads and maidens, sick ones and burdened and sad. See, here is another King. But here is no purple or fine linen; here is no palace; here are no stately men-of-war. *“And Jesus went forth, and saw a great multitude, and was moved with compassion toward them, and healed their sick.”* This is the King indeed.

Herod made a feast. Within was the glitter of gold; within the sound of revelry; within the haughty nobles and proud captains. But here is another scene. It is eventide; the dewy air grows chill; the sun hastens away amidst its golden splendor; the long shadows of the hills fall about the people. And the disciples came, saying, “This is a desert place, and the time is far passed; send them away, that

they may go into the villages and buy themselves bread." Nay, our King doth not send His guests away thus. "They need not depart," saith He. And He made them sit on the grass, and then He took the five loaves and brake amongst them, and "they did all eat, and were filled."

But of all the chapter, nothing is more beautiful in the revelation of Jesus than these words which connect the two sections, the story of Herod and these incidents in the life of Jesus. "*And his disciples [the disciples of John] came, and took up the body, and buried it, and went and told Jesus.*" Stunned, bewildered, blinded by their great grief, what can they do? Now, let them go back every man to his house. Their master is dead and buried; what is left to them but a loneliness of grief? Jesus was almost a rival of their master, whose growing fame had diverted men's minds from him. Jesus taught much that John forbade, and much that perplexed these disciples. If Jesus were indeed the Messiah, how could He permit this brave and faithful witness to perish at the hands of a tyrant like Herod? I want you to ask yourself what was the character of the blessed Savior, that at such a time these disciples

should come to Him in their sorrow and tell Him? It was noised abroad rapidly enough, so that it was not merely that they might bring Him the information. Everybody knew of it within a day. But, sad and bewildered, they seemed to feel instinctively that *there* was their solace, *there* was their rest; *and they went and told Jesus*. And it is just a summary of the life of Jesus. The world was always telling Him of its sorrows and needs. A man is at His feet; it is poor Jairus telling Him about the little sick maiden at home. There is a delay in the crowd; it is the poor woman telling Him for what cause she had touched Him, and how she was made whole. There is a centurion come to tell Him about his servant; and a mother come to tell Him about an afflicted daughter. Ah! He hath an ear for the whisper of every grief. He hath a heart for the whole world's sorrow. This is He whom we would set forth to-day, and to whom we would draw near.

Is not this the want of the world? Some one to whom to tell its troubles. The wise counsel of a brilliant woman of the last generation was this, "Don't trouble people about your symptoms, physical or spir-

itual." Probably the most intolerable bores living are those who are always demanding your interest in their symptoms, entering minutely into all the ills of body or soul or spirit. But that these are bores to us may mean only that we are lacking in love and sympathy. I believe that the greatest blessing that you could give to tens of thousands of men and women in London is this: some one to whom they could fully and freely open their hearts. I think the workers in this Mission would tell you that the grace they need pray for most constantly is not the grace of courage, not the grace of hope, but the grace patiently to listen to the stories of those who come to them. Is not this the need of many here to-day, and of all of us in turn? Young folks with aspirations after goodness, where goodness is sneered at:—to shape the vague aspiration, and to utter it, would of itself be a great strength, a blessed beginning. Wearied souls beset with doubts and bewildered with the triumphs of evil; men and women bound down by the past—that black unalterable past from which nothing can set them free—long to find some ear, some kindly, gracious, loving friend to whom they could tell it all; men and women harassed and bur-

dened by common difficulties, money matters, and business troubles, and common week-day perplexities, consumed by secret sorrows which it would be ever so much easier to bear if they could but intrust them to some friend. The heaviest burden of care is to be uncared for; the hardest thing to endure is the loneliness of one's grief. And, alas! in all of us are *sins*, failures, that we would hide from ourselves, and yet which if we could but tell, the telling should bring repentance and relief, and the grasp of a brotherly hand might help us to break from them. Here is the want of the world. If the blessed Savior did not make provision for this want, then He could not be a Savior such as He is. And if the provision for the want is to be found only in human professional priests, then we had better go back and be Jews; for in the New Testament we can not find from beginning to end any such provision, and if we could we should not be half satisfied. But, blessed be God, in this book we do find that Jesus Christ Himself has come to supply this very need. *We have such a High Priest.* But *Priest* is a word that has come to be too hard, too official, too formal, too cold, to tell of what

He is and of what He would be to us. *We have such a Friend.*

Now let us set ourselves this morning to find the Savior in this aspect of His character. It may be we have thought of Him as the Christ of long ago who lived His life of perfect love, and then went up to heaven. Nay, indeed; without Him we shall never get there. You have known Him, perhaps, as the great Teacher whose words you have read and sought to obey. But words are hard and cold, and even His words are lacking hands to help and bless. You have known Him perhaps as the Savior who bare the sins of the world in His own body on the tree. But for this intimacy there must be more than that. I was told of a man some time ago who heard a minister preach a sermon by which he was greatly impressed, and the impression deepened until the man felt that he must seek an interview with the minister. So he called upon him. But when he called, the reception was so cold, inquiry as to his business was so frigid and distant, that the good man was frightened; he made some apology for intruding and hurried away, leaving the minister to make of it what best he could. Now ask yourself what do we require in Him who

would win us to Himself for this opening of the heart? There is a stateliness in His dealing with the crowds, the natural majesty of the King. There is a greatness about Him in His miracles, the glory of the Creator. We see Him stand amidst the hushed storm, and we ask, "What manner of man is this, that the winds and the waves obey Him?" But what manner of man is He to whom little groups of mourners and single sufferers shall come to find consolation, healing, strength?

He must understand our need. There are cold and exclusive natures that give no sympathy and ask none. Self-contained and solitary, they repel you at a glance. There are others, many others, who have lost all trust; they have been hardened into defiance. But he who wins our trust must have a heart full of generous impulse, of ready help. And I can think, too, that it must be softened by sorrow and touched with the feeling of our infirmities. Think how Jesus Christ Himself yearned for the sympathy of the disciples. "From that time Jesus began to show the disciples how that He must go up to Jerusalem and suffer many things at the hands of the elders and chief priests." Do you remember how rudely Peter

rebuked Him? "This be far from Thee, Lord." Then came the week of silence. Christ's heart too full of sorrow; the agony of the cross too heavy and dreadful for Him to think of anything else. And the disciples refusing to hear His words, refusing to give their sympathy, until it may be that the human brain of Christ must have been crushed, unless He could find the relief of utterance, the strength of sympathy. And He, all burdened, goes up the mount. "And there appeared Moses and Elijah talking with Him of the decease that He should accomplish at Jerusalem." He knows that burden of grief. He knows that burden of loneliness. He knows the longing, the *necessity*, for such relief as friendly intercourse can bring. Again and again it is written that He took the twelve and began to tell them what things should happen unto Him. We seem to hear Him saying, "Come near to Me, My disciples. I want your love, your sympathy, the strength which you can give Me. Let Me tell you of My sorrows." Do you remember how that, in the garden of Gethsemane, He goes exceeding sorrowful and appeals to the chosen disciples, "Tarry ye here and watch with Me," and going but a little distance from them He

kneels in an agony of prayer; and then, yearning for human sympathy, comes back to find them *asleep*? And again He kneels, and sweats as it were great drops of blood. And lo, once again Heaven comes to help Him; there appeared an angel strengthening Him. This is our Christ, our Brother, who Himself knows the great burdens that so press upon us, and bids us come and tell Him all the heart.

Again, *If there is to be this confidence there must be intimacy.* Sorrow is a sacred thing with which a stranger intermeddleth not. A perfect approachableness, a ready openness and oneness with us,—this must be ours. Fear is fatal to trust. He must be *at home* with us, and we must be at home with Him. Some people have too great a Savior to do anything but pray to. I can stand afar off in my need and cry for help, but I can not stand afar off and tell the secret sorrow, the burdening fear, the haunting shame, the constant failure. “*I fell at His feet as dead,*” says John,—John, His beloved disciple, who had leaned on the bosom of the Lord. “*I fell at His feet as dead,*” so he writes when he saw the Savior in His majesty and high glory as

the King of heaven. But lo! He cometh to us still as the gracious and homely Brother. "Behold," saith He, "I stand at the door and knock;" open unto Me; let Me come in and be at home with thee; open unto Me, not the door only, but thine innermost heart, and tell Me all thy need.

Then one thing more there must be for this perfect confidence. *There must be leisure;*

"A heart at leisure from itself,
To soothe and sympathize!"

So sings one in an exquisite hymn that has enriched all the Churches. The impatience which stands, watch in hand, and says, "I can give you five minutes," gives generally nothing, and less than nothing to sad hearts. Never was there a life into which so much was crowded as into those three brief years of Jesus Christ. "He had no leisure so much as to eat." No leisure, indeed for himself; but for others, what leisure! The wonderful leisure of that life was not its least wonder. Nicodemus comes at night; what leisure to talk at length with Him! He sits wearied and hot at the well; what leisure for the woman who comes to draw

water! So think of Him now that He has entered into His glory, gentle and patient, wanting us to come to Him and open all the heart. This is Jesus; this is Jesus as we need Him and as He wants to be to us. He stands in the midst of us; but, dear heart, look up and see that face. Methinks it is somewhat saddened. The dreadful shame and grief of Calvary He came prepared for, and accepted for the joy that was set before Him, enduring the cross, despising the shame. But this grief hath no such compensation; this grief must be a wonder to Him. "Why, my blessed Master, is Thy countenance sad? Surely Thou hast had grief and shame enough for our sakes?" "Soul, I am grieved that thou dost not trust Me with thy fear, and tell Me all thine heart. I am grieved that thou wilt not suffer Me to be to thee all that I could and would. I am grieved that thou art burdened when I could take away thy burden; that thou hast a secret which thou dost not share with Me." The claim of His love is that we tell Him *all*, all our sin, all our sorrow, all our fear, and all our joy.

Let us think of all this as *possible*, and *possible for us*. This much is certain—is it not?—that

once there came into the world One so full of tender pity and gracious helpfulness that all kinds of people were drawn to tell Him all their hearts. All that had any grief or sickness or need came to Him and found healing and rest and blessing. What has become of that blessed Jesus? Has He gone up to heaven to sit in great glory upon His throne amongst the holy angels, far away from us and out of reach, leaving a memory of what used to be, out of which to make a creed? Then I will not call *that* a gospel at all. It is only a mournful story of my loss; a melancholy reminder of my loneliness and poverty. Do you call it kind to tell some little hungry orphan of a mother's love? Do you think you can comfort it by depicting that tender presence, the watchful eyes, the eager love, and then for the little one to turn to itself, orphaned and forsaken? I will not be so cruel as to preach that gospel. No, indeed. Am I not as needy as they were of old? Is not life to me a mystery as to them? Have I not my sins, my sorrows, my burdens, just as they had? And I am to have only the story of what they had. It does not cheer my loneliness to have only words about Him. I must be gladdened

by that very Presence. I must know Him as surely as John did, and Thomas, and Mary, and the sisters at Bethany.

Do you sigh, "Alas! that is impossible for us, because they had Him in His bodily presence?" Nay, that bodily presence somewhat concealed and severed them from Him. I am to know Him not less, but more fully and more perfectly than they could. He goes away only that He may come again unto us, more completely than ever before. "I will not leave you orphaned," saith He; "I will come unto you." "If a man love Me, he will keep My words; and My Father will love him; and We will come and make our abode with him." "Lo, I am with you alway," saith He, "even unto the end of the world." We are to be strengthened with might by His Spirit in the inner man, that Christ may dwell in the heart by faith. "Behold," saith He, amidst the visions of heaven,—“behold, I stand at the door, and knock. If any man hear My voice and open unto Me, I will come in and sup with him, and he with Me.”

Jesus Christ seeks to have with us as close and constant an intimacy as He ever had with any.

But I think I hear another sigh, "Alas! I can think of such a high honor, such a blessed life, as possible to saints; within reach of those who by their very birth and high surroundings have breathed an atmosphere of heaven; by the constraint of pure examples and sweet influences have been fitted for such high communion; a spiritual aristocracy which has the permission to enter the palace of the King. But, ah me! I am coarse, poor, sinful. I am thrust back by a thousand hands from without and held down by a thousand evil things within. Such intimacy, such high and blessed communion, such abiding nearness and friendship, could never be mine." Soul, it is a cruel and bitter wrong that thou dost thy Lord in such a thought of Him. Listen to His words; not to the ardent saints whose souls flame with eager love, but to those whom He must upbraid as dull and dead towards Himself: "Behold, I stand at the door and knock: if *any* man, *any* man, hear My voice, and will open unto Me, I will come in and sup with *him*." Did this blessed Jesus ever reject any? Were any too poor, too bad, too shameful, to find a welcome at his hands, and to have all His love for their own? It is a sin and a shame, indeed,

to think so of Him who hath given us such tokens and proofs of His great love. In the round world this day, dear soul, there is none living that my Lord loves more than He loves *you*; there is none whom He longs to bless more than you; there is none whom He would bring into a closer intimacy and make more perfectly His own. *Yours* are the very sins that He comes to pardon; *yours* are the very cares that He seeks to carry; *yours* are the very sorrows that He waits to heal. *This intimacy is possible for us.*

Surely you begin to be a little bolder. Do you look up and ask: "*How, then, may this friendship be mine, in which there is neither fear nor sorrow, but my heart shall tell Him all?*" Well, we have seen that what Jesus was of old He is still; and that what He ever was to any He would be to us. Take fast hold of that at the outset. And now let us go forth to see what He is and what we may tell Him.

It may be that you have been thinking of this as the high privilege of saints, spiritual and sublime, who have schooled themselves to such endur-

ance that they scarcely feel pain or want or sorrow; and, like the seraphim in the vision, if they stand upon this earth at all, the wings do cover their feet; they are here as those who belong rather to heaven than earth, and who fly rather than walk. And *your* wants are so commonplace, are they not? And your thoughts are about a thousand little things? Well, come and see. Come not to the Church when men gather bowed in adoration; but come away to a wedding. Here is Jesus in the party. Now the wine is done; and the poor host, bewildered and burdened, whispers to the virgin mother with a sigh, "The wine is done, what shall we do?" At once the burden of this want is told to Jesus, "They have no wine." What think you? Did He draw Himself up, indignant and shocked that they should bring Him such a worldly request? Was He so absorbed in heavenly meditation that these guests could scarcely secure His attention, much less His concern and interest? Nay indeed, that is not Jesus. He is the Friend, the kindly Brother, coming into our homes to make our wants His own, and having a joy in ministering to our joy. And lo, as the waterpots are filled to the brim, and it is borne to the governor of

the feast, saith he, "They have kept the best wine till the last."

His love is the tender love which concerns itself about all that concerns us; that can not only care for us on certain sides of our character and in certain aspects of our life. There are places to which we go sometimes where we ask for this and that, and we get it. But presently we ask for something of which I am told, "That is not in this department." I do not think any little child ever came to its mother with a want and its mother bade it go elsewhere; that was not in her department. I am *sure* no soul ever came to Jesus Christ and had to be sent away because that need was not in His department. Love that loves at all must love in everything; love that cares for anything must make everything its care.

Here in this very chapter I find the disciples troubled as to what the people are to do for their supper. "This is a desert place," they say; "send them away, that they may go before it is dark and buy themselves bread; for they have nothing to eat." The answer of Jesus, if it means anything at all,

means this, that a man's want of supper must not drive him *from* the Lord, but *to* the Lord.

My brother, so long as you and I are in this world we need a gospel that has to do with common needs and vulgar wants. Our religion must make room for a great deal that is not a bit sentimental and not even spiritual, but very commonplace and of the earth, earthy. Do you object that it is a perilous thing to make our religion tend to selfish indulgence? Well, I think my Savior would much rather have me take my care to Him, even if it should be born of selfish thought, than that I should carry my burden of care as if He did not care anything about it. If my thought and desires are selfish—and, alas! they often are—the best place to get the selfishness cured is at His feet; and the best way for me to get set right is by the touch of His hand. If I am to cast all my care upon Him, I must cast a great many cares about common things; and if my Lord careth for me at all, He careth for me as much in these things as in any. I do my Lord a grievous wrong and myself a great injury when I can not trust my Lord with all that concerns me. Our love even does not deal with the little

ones thus; when a child asks us for bread, or fish, or egg, we do not reply, "Beware, my child, that your filial love is not corrupted by selfish motives."

But do you object again, "The age of miracles is past, you know?" Nay I don't know. Has the love of God ceased? Has the power of God ceased? Has the knowledge of God ceased? Am I to come with my needs and look into the face of the Savior only to hear Him say, "I am really very sorry for you, dear soul, but I can not help you; the age of miracles is over, you know, and you must look to the laws of nature?" Never—never. We have not so learned Christ. I come with my cares and look into the face of One whose grief is over my doubt; whose upbraiding is because I ask so little; whose wonder is at my unbelief; whose great love hath a joy in blessing me. He who hath taught us to come to Him, saying, "Give us this day our daily bread," means that I am to tell Him all the common earthly needs of every day, and means that He has pledged Himself to hear and answer my prayer. Dear heart, in the name of my Lord I charge thee, when Want knocks at the door, when Fear whispers its messages chilling the blood, *go and tell Jesus.*

See again. Here is John the Baptist in the dungeon, bowed and cast down, daily exposed to the revenge of Herodias and to the moods of the fickle king. No wonder John is perplexed and even bewildered. Is the Messiah come, the King of kings and Lord of lords, and yet is this Herod to sit and sin defiantly, and is this Herodias to have her way? Is the forerunner and herald of the Christ to linger forgotten in the dungeon? Was it not foretold concerning Christ that He should open the prison doors to them that are bound? Can this indeed be He? John is disappointed, almost deceived. He had thought that he should share in the splendor of that kingdom which the Son of David had come to set up, and here he is in the dungeon gloom, with the chain about him. So forth from the prison he sent two of his disciples to ask the Savior, "*Art Thou He that should come, or look we for another?*" Not a tone of resentment is there in the Savior's reply, not a breath of reproof; far from it. He went on to speak of John the Baptist as He never spoke of any other; and that same hour He wrought many miracles, and said, "Go, shew John again the things that ye have seen and heard."

There are many things that do prison us and hold us as in fetters of brass. There is the triumph of evil; it sits enrobed and crowned, and makes merry at its banquet whilst the truth is in chains, faithfulness and goodness are in the dungeon. It is hard, it is mysterious; dark doubts assail us. The soul, eager for good, is made powerless. Disappointed and perplexed, things seem to us at such times in a hopeless confusion. It may be pain, gnawing pain, that eats into the very faith, and fills the soul with aching doubts. "Why is this?" moans the sad heart. Or maybe it is family affliction that weighs us down heavily; and like Herod's executioner, who stands with sword in hand, there is ever beside us some grim terror, a possibility of ill, that threatens day by day. Or it may be purely spiritual; horrid whispers of hell that do assail us; vague doubts that we can scarce put into words, but which shut out Heaven and hide our way, like mists which we can not take hold of, but which bewilder and blind us. What can we do in times like these? Do as these did; *Go and tell Jesus*. If He be willing to carry my sins, He will not refuse to deal with my doubts. If He love me well enough to die for me,

He loves me well enough to assure me of His love. It may be that I can not understand the purpose of His dealings yet, but He will give me His hand to hold, His arm to lean upon, the comfort and rest of His presence. It may be better not to remove the ill, but He shall give me Himself as my Refuge and Strength. Sad soul, tell Him thy story. When grief fills the soul, and gloomy doubts gather, *go and tell Jesus.*

XIII.

HOW BEST TO BLESS THE WORLD.

"This poor widow."—St. Mark xii, 43.

FOR us every one to-day, as ever, the great question is this: *What is the best thing I can do to serve the world in which I live?*

In the little story of this poor widow I think we may find many helpful thoughts. Taken by itself the story is very beautiful; but its beauty and force are greatly increased by its position. The setting of the gem enriches it.

It was on the Tuesday of the week of the Passover. If anything in the past ever resembled the stir of our own London, its bustle, its eager business, its pride, its diversity of interests, its busy religiousness, it was Jerusalem at this festival. From all parts of the thickly-populated Palestine, and indeed from all parts of what was then called the world, came the crowds, until the city was filled

to overflowing on every side. There was the quickened life and excitement of the throngs as if life, being driven into a smaller space, became concentrated and intensified. Business was at its best. The Jew, always a merchant, knew how to avail himself of such opportunities. Cries of the dealers rang in the streets and intruded upon the courts of the Temple, making the Father's house a place of merchandise. Every place was noisy with buyers and sellers as Jesus passed on His way. Just as the fairs of our own country originated in Church festivals, so were the festivals of the Jewish Church times of extensive trading. On every side were those whose souls were in their goods and their gains. Thus was there all the feverish excitement of our city life, and there, as now, the "worth" of men was determined chiefly by their money; and as in our times, political questions burned in the hearts of the people. There, too, haughty exclusiveness asserted itself in its very looks and proclaimed its importance by its very strut. There was the materialism of this age, questioning everything and scorning those who ventured to answer the question. Over all there was the stately and splendid religiousness embodied in

the Temple, the center and glory of the nation. Yet amidst all this life there hung over the city the dreadful doom which Jesus had spoken as He stood on the Mount of Olives and looked forth upon the city, and with tears had bewailed the fate which He foretold.

Among all these millions of eager people, at a moment of such awful import, whilst the groups of rich and wise and pompous worshipers passed Him in the Temple courts, Jesus calls His disciples to Him and bade them look at *this poor widow*. Who was she, and what, to be thus honored? Let us come and see.

It will be well for us to look at these groups a little more closely as they come before us in this chapter, the background which throws the poor widow into such strange prominence.

I. *Here is the Political Group.* The Pharisees and Herodians, made one by their abhorrence of their common foe, send a deputation of their most skillful men to demand of Jesus Christ a declaration of His attitude towards the Roman power. He is a man with the influence of a prophet amongst the

people. If they can get Him to commit Himself against the Roman authority, they can set that authority at work to crush Him. If He should declare Himself *for* Rome, the people will fall off from Him and His power will be gone. So they feel sure they will "catch" Him, as the record puts it. Like the hunter who creeps warily and fears to frighten what he would capture, so they come with honeyed words and stealthy tread. "Master, we know that Thou art true, and carest for no man: for Thou regardest not the person of men, but of a truth teachest the way of God. Is it lawful to give tribute unto Cæsar or not? Shall we give, or shall we not give?" Looking them through and reading their inmost thoughts, Jesus said, "Show me a penny." He Himself, we can well think, had not a penny; poorer than this poor widow was He who was rich and for our sakes became poor. The penny is handed to Him, with the head of the Roman emperor stamped upon it, the token of their hated subjection.

"Whose is this image and superscription?" He asks.

"Cæsar's," say they.

Handing them back the coin, He saith: "Render

unto Cæsar the things that are Cæsar's, and to God the things that are God's."

Confused and silent, they went their way. And Jesus let them go. Here is not that which He will call His disciples to look at.

And does this poor widow pass between them, and lift her eyes for a moment to gaze at these rulers of the city; and, sighing, does she go on her way, saying, "Ah, me! if I were only great and influential as they are, then could I do something for our unhappy city! But I am nobody!" And, wrapping her thin dress about her wasted form, she tightens her hold upon her two mites—her all.

Of their particular question I do not speak; but I would look only at the questioners, and as they go on their way and we turn to ourselves, we feel that the hope and salvation of London is not in its politicians. The legislators are what the people make them—I had almost said what the people compel them to be. Men chosen of the people, they can but fulfill the will of the people. Find that which shapes the people, and you will have got at that which shapes their Parliaments and their county councils. Thank God for laws which make it easy

for men to do right and hard for men to do wrong. Parliament and county councils have great power, and we Christians are alike very foolish and very blameworthy if we do not exert ourselves to the utmost to secure as our legislators men with clean hands. They who break the laws of God ought to have no power to make the laws of man. But if we would get at the root of the matter, we must get much further and deeper down than this. The very words of the Lord Jesus declare a truth which until then had been unheard of: that there was a realm with which the State could not interfere; that the spirit of man without restraint or constraint must be free to worship God and to serve Him. Let legislation do its utmost it can not do enough; it can not make men unselfish, pitiful, loving, brotherly. We do not make light of its power; we do but recognize its limits. Legislation can do much for London, and has indeed much to do; but to save the city or the nation it will not avail.

II. *Here is the Philosophical Group.* "Then come unto Him the Sadducees," the Agnostics, as they call themselves to-day; they who know noth-

ing because there is nothing to know. Scorning the people as vulgar, they scorn Jesus Christ as one of the people. With these, religion is a thing not to be seriously discussed, only to be ridiculed. The resurrection was a superstition, and to be superstitious was not philosophical. Angels were a myth, and myths were only amusing. Religion was a riddle, and to guess the riddle was rude. The only true creed, the only true service, was to doubt, to deny, to sneer. This group is busy amongst us to-day. O, it is infinitely sorrowful that, whilst men and women and little children suffered, whilst every day brought nearer the destruction of the city, whilst the hour of the crucifixion had almost come, these can find nothing more worth the doing than to vex the world with their conundrums. "If a woman marry seven brothers, whose shall she be in the resurrection?" Of these we can only say what our patient and gracious Master said, *"Is it not for this cause that ye err, because ye know not the Scriptures, nor the power of God?"*

The hope of old time was not in these; nor in these lies the hope of to-day.

Did it chance that here "this poor widow" came

on her way, and lifted her timid glance in presence of these learned ones? And then, as the sad eyes fell on the ground, she sighed, "Ah me! if I were but clever and could argue, then perhaps I might do something for this great city!" And she sighed again, as her hand closed about the two mites, her all, and thought of how dreadful it was to be so ignorant!

III. *The Group of Money-givers.* Jesus had gone down under the shadow of the portico, and sat now over against the treasury, whither a crowd of people streamed to put their contributions in the boxes that were ranged along the wall. This group comes before us as the next suggested remedy for the ills of our great city,—*Give money.* It is the cheapest thing to give; that is, it costs least, and is made the most of; for does it not duly appear in reports, credited to the uttermost penny? It brings a kind of satisfaction to the soul of having done its duty, so that the good soul can reward itself for its good deed sumptuously. A subscription, like charity, can cover a multitude of sins, both of omission and commission. By all means bring your

tithes into the storehouse; you need it for your own good. And most certainly money is a real power for good—*sometimes*. We think, as all other workers think, that we could do a great deal more good if we could get a great deal more money. If the Church is going to overtake the world, certainly its scale of giving will have to be increased a hundred-fold. On pleasure, on drink, on everything else, this nation spends its millions freely, while it grudges its “small sums” for the work of the Church. For a great work like this in the West End of London what were ten thousand pounds? And how many could give it and feel it less than many an artisan and servant-maid feel the sovereign that they give! But *money is not going to save London*. And let no man think that he has done his duty, or even the half of it, when he has given a subscription. There are seven devils that do afflict London and torment her grievously: *Pride, Drink, Lust, Gambling, Sweating, Ignorance*, and last, but not least, *Indiscriminate Charity*. Money, if it be money only, is but a “sounding brass” and no true gold; that comes from the love and wisdom with which it is given.

And amongst this group this poor widow stands,

seeing the rich cast their much into the treasury. That sad face grows yet more sad and the heavy heart sighs, "Ah me! if I were but rich, how great things I would do!" And she grasps with shame her little gift, the two mites which are her all.

IV. *The Great Stones.* Here is another group, which I think completes the suggested remedies. It is found on the other side of the incident: "And as He went out of the Temple one of the disciples said unto Him, Master, see what manner of stones are here." It was a protest against, almost indeed reproof for, the words which the Master had spoken: "There shall not be one stone left upon another." "What power can overthrow stones such as these? And so holy as they are, too! Here is the very house of God; the tabernacle of the Most High, where He is known for a refuge! Think of its priests, its altars, see its courts of marble; its Gate Beautiful; its fretted towers rising up against the heaven. Surely, whatever evils gathered against the Holy City, this Temple shall render them powerless for ill. Behold these stones!" But these were not the safety of the city. By all means give architecture its op-

portunity, for this, too, is a gift from God. Let Beauty have her place; alas that there should be so little of it! Let the soul be uplifted by the lovely, and solemnized by all that is sublime. But it is a poor consolation amidst the burdens of humanity, the strife and sorrow, the heart-achings and heart-breakings, to turn and cry, "*Behold what manner of stones are here!*" The hope of London is not in its stones.

V. *Now comes another; not a group, but one only.* And as Jesus sits and catches sight of her His face loses its sorrow. What is it that stirs His interest? Has He found some hope for Jerusalem? Yes, indeed; hope for the world. Come and see. Amidst stately Sadducees and pompous Pharisees and princely strangers bringing of their abundance, there creeps all timidly the poor widow, pale-faced and bearing many tokens of her poverty, standing aside for one and another; presently she hurries, half-ashamed, as if she scarcely had a right here, and, lifting her hand, she drops into the treasury her all. And Jesus called His disciples and whispered, "*See this poor widow.*"

What does London want? Well, first of all, the blessed presence of Him who sat over against the treasury. Him we have, unchanging and abiding with us. "*Lo, I am with you alway.*" But what more do we need? *This loving heart, that gives its all.*

This poor widow—what can she do? How startled she would be if she knew that Jesus was watching her! How frightened if she knew that He and His disciples were talking of her; that they had indeed forgotten all else in sight of her! Who, indeed, shall think of her? She can not influence Parliament and county councils. She has not even a vote. What can she do to solve great social problems? How, indeed, can she help anybody? She is so poor. Her name could not come into a report; they do not print half-pence. Yet there she stands, right in the very foreground, while Sadducee and Pharisee, and rich men and great stones, all fade away in the distance. She lives forever; and her example blesses the wide world this day.

What folly is it to waste life in dreaming of the many wonderful works we would do if we were somebody else!

Behold this poor widow.

There is the most helpful and blessed thing in all the world—a simple, loving heart that just gives itself, its all to God; that waits not for any organization or orders, but yields its whole being to the impulses of love and gives itself away in doing good. The best thing, the only thoroughly good thing, that we can do for the great world, is to fill our own little world with love. This is the sorest need of the world which neither Parliament nor councils, nor school boards, nor stately Churches can meet: *Brotherly Love*. Not patronage is mostly wanted, nor even pity only, nor simply gifts, but the true love that can keep nothing back; the love that claims and consecrates its all to God and charity. *This poor widow* may, in her poverty, buy the luxury of love which is the luxury of God. This highest possibility lies within reach of the lowliest—this life of kindness, of helpfulness, that holds itself and all for others' good.

Where can we find it? Alas! what can smite at our cruel selfishness and pride; at our half-hearted service of God, and utter indifference to our neighbor? It is ours in Him, and in Him only, who sat over

against the treasury. *To receive Him* that He Himself may live in us His life of love—thus only is this life of love ours. Think of this great city, its vast population; its enormous wealth; its influence; its intellect; its varied life. As the Lord Jesus Christ bends beholding it shall we ask ourselves, What most of all should serve Him? Surely to each one of us He saith, “*My son, give Me thine heart.*”



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